

Words Words Words

COLIN LEGUM'S restrained pleading in *The Observer* London, was one of five distinct voices urging their Rhodesian opinions on the British public. Harold Wilson, wrote Legum, "is directly responsible for failing to make his intentions credible to even those Africans initially well disposed to his ideas. He seems to have acted on the assumption that Africans would automatically accept his bona fides. While Mr. Wilson's shrewd tactics are easily understood in Britain, to Africans they look like equivocations or deviousness." Less admirable perhaps than *Private Eye's* splendid invective but more likely to influence events. *Private Eye* accused Wilson of playing the whole Rhodesia issue for headlines, to strengthen his personal position, for electoral advantage, to split the Tory opposition, and even to help him weaken the present form of cabinet government in England. The socialist *Tribune* and, further left, *The Week* were mild by comparison. To lull British racism and to keep the headlines, snarled *Private Eye*, Wilson had to keep flattering Smith ("one of the most mediocre little burks in the Southern Hemisphere"). Thus also "the pledge never to use force, thus the cold brush-offs to the African leaders and the contempt for the concept—obviously repulsive to Wilson—of one man, one vote. At all costs Wilson had to rule out any idea that what he was doing in Rhodesia had anything to do with multiracialism . . . UDI was an insult to the Queen and her Governor; it was illegal; and it was anti-Britain. If there were any other issues at stake, Wilson did not seem to know about them." In *The Week* a contributor opposed the call that British troops be sent to put down Smith's rebellion with "the socialist axiom; the liberation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. . . . My betting is that the only time we will see British troops sent to Rhodesia is when British big business investments are in danger. The job in Rhodesia is to assist in every way the struggle of the African people to liberate themselves."

THE TORY PRESS—but for the *Daily Mail*—and many Tory politicians have been calling for appeasement with Munich-like fervour. Some have mouthed regrets at Smith's rebellion others have not and a few, like Lord Lambton, M.P. on B.B.C. television, have simply said Smith would win anyway so why fight?

SO HERE WERE four voices: restrained pleading, splendid invective, and appeasement both equivocal and brazen. The fifth, an especially British article, came from *The Spectator* which has acted throughout as if almost nothing has happened. Its description of UDI was masterly:

"Mr. Smith's shortsightedness has resulted in the suspension of negotiations."

IT IS DIFFICULT to sort out cupidity from muddle in official British handling of the Southern Rhodesian rebellion, particularly over the radio station being set up in Bechuanaland. Perhaps someone in Bechuanaland can confirm the story that it is being built on land belonging to a white Rhodesian—of all Bechuanaland's 165,000 square miles. More difficult to check is the story that it has been bought from a firm in, of all places, Texas, which is itself busy selling Smith jamming equipment. He won't need the latter much in any case as the 10 kilowatt transmitter can only be heard in Salisbury at night. It would have had to have been at least 50 kilowatts to have been effective, and it should in any case have started operating months if not years ago to have been any answer to the Rhodesian Front's private Zeesen.

GOVAN MBEKI'S *The Peasants Revolt* (Penguin African Library) came out in July 1964, the month *The New African* began the underground trek from Cape Town to London. It is necessarily sketchy and incomplete—Mbeki wrote parts of it on lavatory paper in gaol in Port Elizabeth, parts of it came from his *Liberation* articles on the Transkei. Here and there are obvious and forgivably faulty later additions his

editors had to make: he was already starting his life sentence on Robben Island when the book was being prepared for the press. But it is a good addition to the small shelf of books on the Transkei, where the Republic's armageddon may well begin. Mbeki is a Transkeian, as well as being a South African and an ANC man. When the three banished Tembu leaders escaped to Basutoland and were suffering much privation there, Mbeki used to send a large part of his *New Age* salary to them each week, and put himself on a voluntary spare diet to make up for it. The banished men were not ANC supporters but they represented the kind of self-sacrificing rural leadership that Mbeki respected, but which the liberation movement in South Africa too long undervalued. He writes of the 1960-61 Pondoland revolt that "it brought alive to the leadership of the ANC in a manner it had never done before the vital need of linking up the struggles of the peasants with those of the workers in the urban areas." History may judge this late realisation harshly. It is a lesson not yet fully learned: vide President Kaunda's remarks to Nicholas Tomalin of the *London Sunday Times* (6 December 1965): "Dr. Kaunda would not be drawn into criticism of his Rhodesian friends. But he did say he felt the Opposition there was not as effective as it might be. The black leaders had chosen to organise mass support in the town where it could be easily suppressed, not in the country as Kaunda did



The threatened language

English loses ground
in South Africa.
Who is to save it?

JOHN POVEY

himself. And he spoke of the tendency among Africans in what seems a hopeless position to 'bourgeoisify' themselves; they imitate the boss and a good salary plus fine furniture comes to be all that matters. Effective African political action, Kaunda pointed out, has only come when the potential leaders decide to give up their all for this political struggle." Be that as it may, Mbeki gave up all and so have thousands of other Southern African heroes, both of town and country, now dead or locked away.

IN ITS DECEMBER issue, *WUS in Action*, published by the World University Service, Geneva, has revived with acknowledgements *The New African's* "Africana" column. The quoted newspaper's touch of cloacal humour is commendable in a country where the apartheid joke has worn a bit thin:

Forty-nine Cape Town multi-racial toilets, run by the City Council for the benefit of the public, have become the last places in South Africa which are still untouched by apartheid.

But City Council officials said they expected the Government to clamp down soon and compel the council to segregate these public conveniences.

One lawyer said: "These are virtually the last bastions of multiracialism in the country and in that sense they will soon be rare items. Before the 'WHITES ONLY' notices are placed on them, one of them should be transferred to the South African Museum".

Lawyers say there are two Acts of Parliament under which the Government could act against the toilets. There is the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, and the Group Areas Act of 1957.

In the Group Areas Act "occupation" is the operative word as far as the toilets are concerned. So far the provision which defines occupation has been directed at people of different races sitting down together in cinemas and restaurants. They only break the law when they are seated, but when they stand up they are in the clear. Lawyers say that if the same criterion is applied to the multi-racial toilets, then standing in them would be legal, but sitting down in them would not.

Another lawyer said: "The Government could, of course, issue permits for people to use the toilets but this is not likely".

EVENING POST (PORT ELIZABETH)

WUS in Action's special Southern African issue covers CADET, the long-hoped-for adult education college for Bechuanaland, higher education in the Republic (by Dr. Dan Kunene, formerly of the University of Cape Town, now UCLA), Angola, Salisbury, Lesotho, and a SWAPO student's escape story, from Ovambo-land, South West Africa, to Finland.

LAMENT ABOUT THE DECLINE of English in South Africa is as tedious as yearning for "the good old days"—and as pointless. Complaints of degenerating pronunciation from some BBC norm, of the defiling of the pure spring of English by slang; stories of illiterate clerks and semiliterate engineers oppress us from every side. The fact that some of these observations may in themselves be true, does not compel the corollary that the pillars of the English language are about to collapse. Nevertheless the position of English in South Africa is threatened. Pressures both linguistic and political must make one concerned about the eventual fate of English in the country. English can be eliminated or, more possibly, reduced to a usage peculiar to the 1½-million-strong British tribe.

The language is daily losing ground among the 11 million Africans, at the mercy of an educational system—"Bantu Education"—which seems partly designed to weaken the 150-year-old grip English has on white South Africa's subject peoples.

The ruling Dutch-descended *Afrikaner-volk* are losing it too, but more by their own wish, since by many of them it is still resented as the language of their one-time British conquerors. The linguistic difficulties common in other areas are thus reinforced in South Africa by political decision and social attitude.

English in South Africa derives, of course, from the British acquisition of the Cape and the subsequent occupation of the Eastern Cape by the 1820 Settlers. Both mission and state education, from earliest times, brought English to the African community, among whom it became, in an unusually pure form, a *lingua franca* whereby the barriers dividing a multiplicity of munity is, by and large, convinced of the be crossed.

Penalties and inducements derived from the priority granted to English in government, law and education, as well as attempts at legislation, were used to try and eliminate the Boer *taal* from the country.

JOHN POVEY, a lecturer in English in the University of California, Los Angeles, visited various parts of Africa in August, including South Africa, where he had been on the staff of the University of the Witwatersrand.

They were not successful, and from them, no doubt, stems some of the linguistic antagonism that exists between the Afrikaners and other language groups in the country today.

The Afrikaner's accent indicates the attitude that if you do have to use English from time to time you will never speak it well enough to be mistaken for a *rooinek*. While the English, on their side, are too ready to assume that the obligation to bilingualism rests only with the other side.

For the Africans it is the one international language within reach—sought after, held to, but now increasingly denied to the coming generation.

FOR THE AFRICANS, indeed, the situation is, as always in this country, the most difficult and the most desperate. The African community is, by and large, convinced the importance of English. For them English is the essential tool of communication, the window to the outside world. It is a vehicle which more than African languages or Afrikaans can penetrate that hated isolation that is imposed by the government. The African writers use English to gain an international audience, to link themselves to a powerful literary tradition. They draw upon the resources of the language yet they extend and alter it so that it becomes a living and individual medium in their hands. Writers like Lewis Nkosi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane and Noni Jabavu have demonstrated what English can achieve when a fresh ear is linked to a different sensibility.

Government legislation, the Bantu Education Act, has decided that African education shall be conducted in the language of the individual tribes. There is some external evidence to show that the mother tongue is the most effective educational medium in the earlier stages of a child's training. The debate in other African countries which have accepted English as their second language centres only upon the question of the most convenient and effective time for introducing the child to the new language. However, no one would pretend that such concerns motivate the decisions of the South African government in their plans for African education. Their motive must be to deny as effectively as possible the chance of the