

Moving to Milton Keynes

Roger Kitchen

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Moving house is never an easy business, although in our mobile society a two or three yearly uprooting can become almost a ritual. But most of the families who are coming to Milton Keynes, Britain's first new city, have not had this sort of experience and are moving not through choice or in order to "get on," but to get decent housing accommodation.

An extra 200,000 people will come to Milton Keynes by the year 2000, making an eventual anticipated population of 250,000. About 20,000 have moved since 1968. Thirteen per cent of those who have arrived since 1968 have come with firms which are relocating their operations in Milton Keynes. For these the move is made a good deal smoother by the employer and the Milton Keynes Development Corporation. Any relocating firm's employees are usually given full information by the development corporation, including an exhibition, a slide show, and an "any questions" session with corporation housing, estates and social development specialists. This is followed up with a sponsored day trip around Milton Keynes to visit show houses and industrial estates, schools and leisure facilities. Over lunch another "any questions" session is held, with

Department of Employment and county education people present to answer queries. Many such firms also give employees generous assistance with their removal and settling-in expenses.

However, about 60 per cent of the families who have moved into Milton Keynes rental housing since 1968 have come to work with a firm which is already established in the area. Many are not very affluent and their experiences are quite different from those who move with a firm. These experiences are worth examining for the insight they give into how important life-changing decisions are made, and the consequences of the present new town strategy for those in housing need.

A family's move to Milton Keynes is often prompted by bad housing conditions. The Milton Keynes Household Survey (1973) reveals that 51 per cent of corporation rental households that have moved since 1968 have come from conditions of housing need. In all, 18 per cent were given the opportunity to live together for the first time. "It was a terrible house. For a start off, it was running alive with mice. The mice were in the beds, in the furniture, and it was making my four children's lives a misery, and mine as well, 'cos I suffer badly from me nerves. It was

half a house—very small, and we were paying almost £6 a week for it. It had two rooms and a kitchen; the rooms had to double as bedrooms as well."

The family may have been on the local council housing waiting list for some years. "The housing made me finally decide to move—that was the only reason. It was impossible to get a place in London. I'd been to the local council up there for five years and I had 32 points on the housing list—I needed 34 to get a place. She said to me in the council, 'The only way you can get a house is by having another child,' and I said, 'I don't want another child, I've got three as it is.'"

It is often the local council housing department in London which recommends to such families that they register under the new and expanded towns scheme at their local labour exchange. Milton Keynes is not usually a conscious choice—it is usually just a place where there is a job vacancy. "We thought about moving out because we couldn't get a nice place in London. It wasn't Milton Keynes, it was just what the labour exchange offered us was Milton Keynes. We just thought we'd like to get out. We did have our name on a new towns list and we had to pick a couple of towns, but Milton Keynes wasn't one of them. Milton Keynes was what the labour exchange suggested. They told us, 'If you take this job here, you can have a house with it,' and so we said 'ok'."

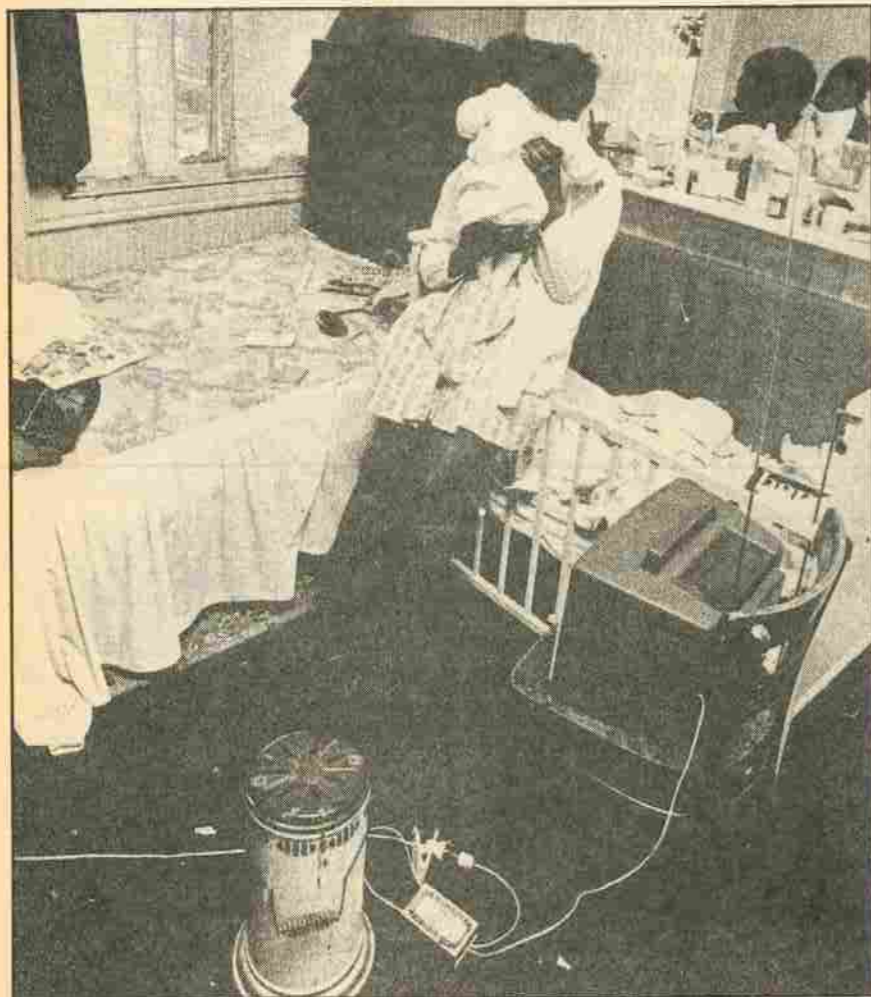
Renters must take a job to get a house and getting decent housing conditions is so important that many families knowingly take a drop in salary because the house is so important. "In moving I'm pounds out. My average wage, before stoppages, was £42 per week, coming home with £35 clear. In the meantime my wife was a charge hand in a fac-

tory earning £15 a week. So all in all we were home about £50 between us. Now I take £

Once the husband has been accepted for a nominated for housing, the family is visited by one of the London visitors. They are given a range of information about the area into which will be moving, but some people do not seem too much of this in. The prospect of a house that interests them. When the London visitor comes are not clear if they have been accepted for corporation for housing. "We didn't really get information about the place we were coming in until we come and paid our rent. We did a woman come round in London and she said there was three possibilities of estates. She told me a sort of housing and layouts they had. She said I'd have to go to Northampton to have the house, I don't think she really said much else. A friend of ours has moved out to Suffolk and she said she came round to see what you keep your house to see whether you're suitable to go and live in new town in a new house. I didn't really know what it was for."

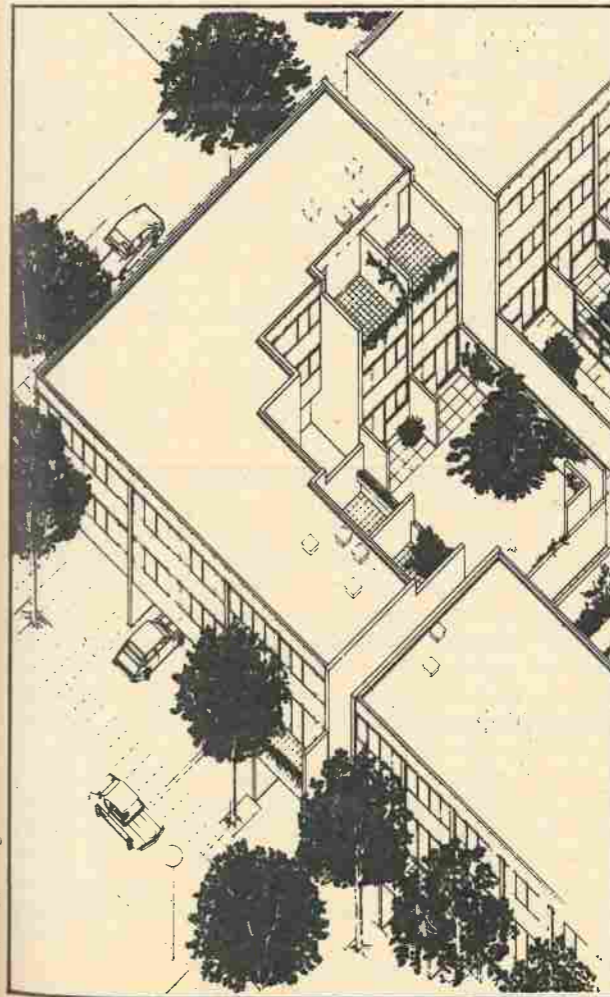
Unless the family pesters the development corporation, they next hear about three weeks after they move that they are being rehoused. They are offered a particular house, and told to collect the keys on a certain day and to bring the rest of the month's outstanding rent with them. Many do not see the estate, let alone the house in which they are going to live perhaps for the rest of their lives, before they move their furniture in. "They sent me the letter saying I had the house, but they didn't come and see it because we couldn't pay the fare, and that's being truthful." "We came up here to look at these houses because

Roger Kitchen is a community worker with Milton Keynes Development Corporation.



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Milton Keynes Development Corporation



Architectural Design



Penny Tweedie

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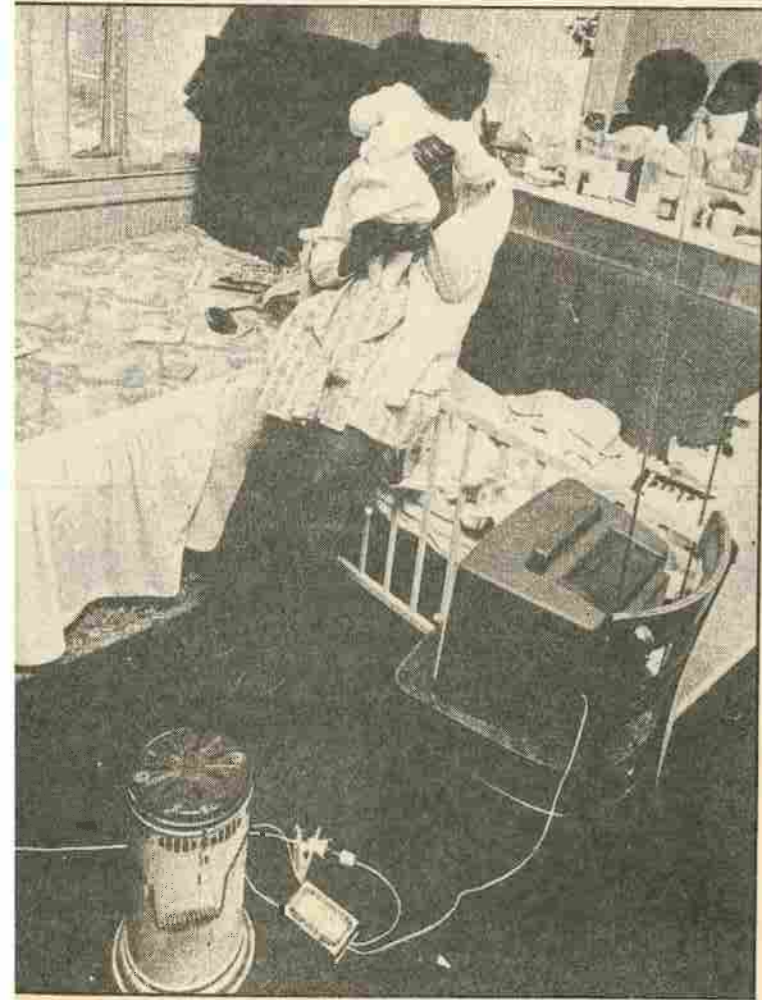
tory earning £15 a week. So all in all we were taking home about £50 between us. Now I take £26."

Once the husband has been accepted for a job and nominated for housing, the family is visited at home by one of the London visitors. They are given a full range of information about the area into which they will be moving, but some people do not seem to take too much of this in. The prospect of a house is all that interests them. When the London visitor leaves, some are not clear if they have been accepted by the corporation for housing. "We didn't really get any information about the place we were coming to live in until we come and paid our rent. We did have a woman come round in London and she said there was three possibilities of estates. She told us what sort of housing and layouts they had. She told me I'd have to go to Northampton to have the baby. I don't think she really said much else. A friend of ours has moved out to Suffolk and she said they come round to see what you keep your house like, to see whether you're suitable to go and live in a new town in a new house. I didn't really know what it was for."

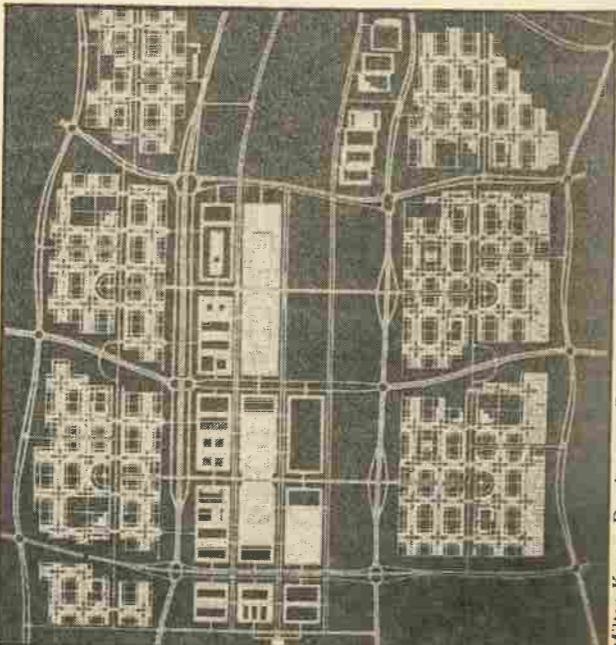
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For families living in poor housing (three people live in the room opposite, far left) the idea of moving to the "utopian" acres of Milton Keynes (centre) may be very attractive. But many underestimate the cost of moving to, and furnishing, their new home and find their finances strained to breaking point. The couple below, however, are now installed there

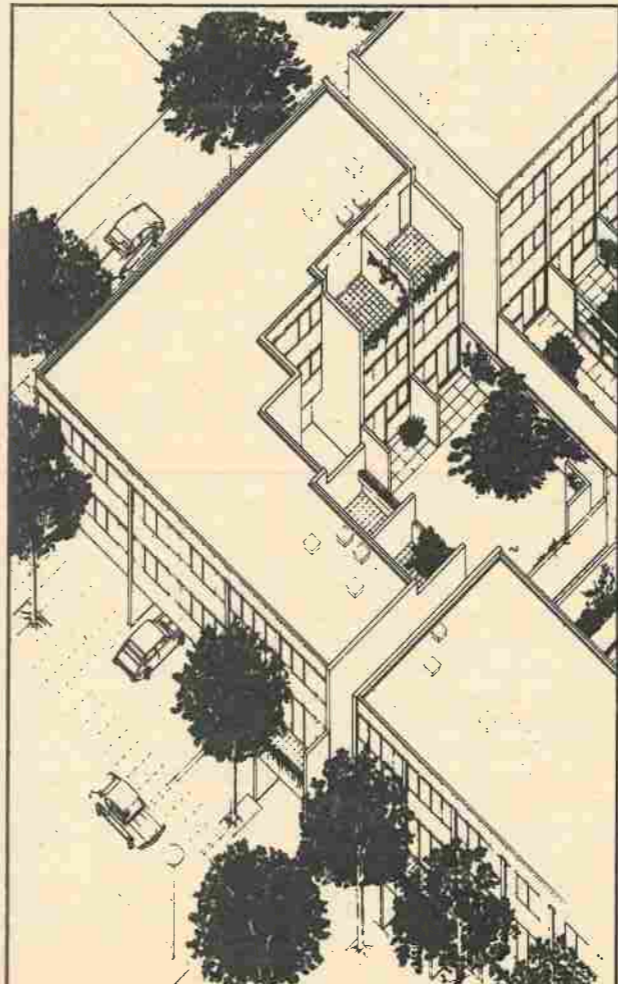
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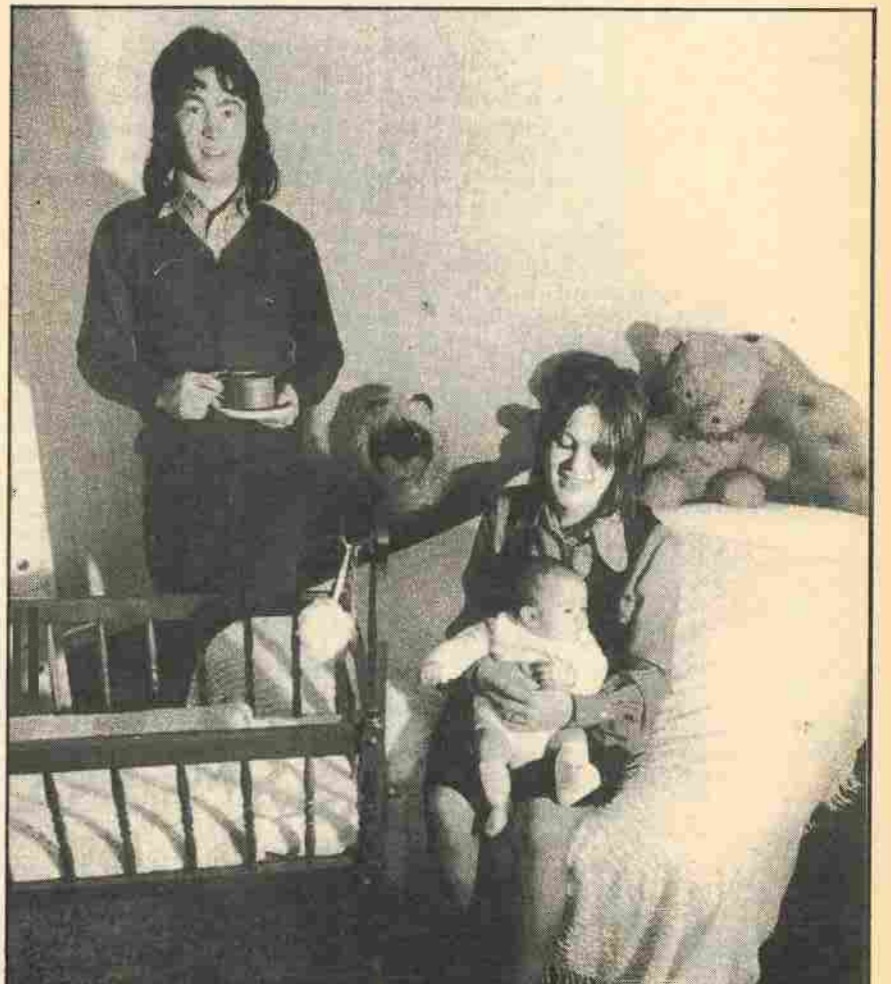
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Architectural Design



Penny Tweedie

Four Years On
(Milton Keynes
Household Survey,
1973)

*The Plan for
Milton Keynes*
(HMSO, 1970)

that any place was better than where we was, so we couldn't have got worse than that." "After we met the London visitor we came up to Bletchley, and we walked up and down Queensway and we asked about where the new estate was and Andrew went to sound out where his job was, but we didn't see these houses. We didn't realise it was all so far away from Bletchley."

As I said previously, the qualification for a rented house in Milton Keynes is that one must have a job in the area. There can often be a delay between obtaining a job and getting a house. This situation can be costly for some men who have to maintain their wife and family and pay for their own lodgings. Others try to bring their family with them, sometimes with painful results, as there is a dearth of temporary accommodation in the area. The *Household Survey* reveals that 46 per cent of all newcomers either needed temporary accommodation at some point, or commuted, or did both.

On average, migrants went into temporary accommodation for four months, and as most did not, or could not, bring their families with them, they had to consider the financial burden of supporting two houses. Only one third of migrants who made temporary arrangements received any financial assistance from their employers. Employees earning under £50 per week were more likely to have to pay these costs than those earning over £50 per week. "We was lucky—we had to wait only three weeks for a house when we'd been told it would be at least three months. In those three weeks my husband was working up here, he had a room up here which cost him £14 a week, Monday to Friday, bed breakfast, and evening meal, but he had to get his own breakfast if he wanted it. In the meantime I was paying nearly £6 for my rent and he was bringing home between £19 and £21 a week. My mum and sister bought my food for me every week—that's the only way we could do it."

The costs of moving can be quite expensive, and those who move under their own steam rather than with a firm which is relocating, do not usually get any assistance with these costs. Borrowing from relatives to see them over this time is not uncommon. "Money was the real problem to us. See, we got the letter the week before, saying we'd got the house, and I was running everywhere for money. I was borrowing money to get £36.27 for the rent, plus the £9 on top of that for the gas, and the first estimate for removal was £75. So I had to borrow money from here and there—from my own family. They had to scrimp and scrape themselves to get me here. In the end I paid £35 for the removal. I kept phoning all round London for the cheapest and that was because my husband had to do it as well." "It cost me £50 to move. We had to move on Saturday, which was the only day I could move, because I was working right up to the Friday, and the men working on a Saturday meant paying them time and a half." Not only is the moving itself expensive, but so is the initial furnishing. Some people are coming from furnished accommodation with little or no furniture, while others feel that a new house cries out for new furniture: "We bought a table, four chairs—that was £48—a stair carpet, we got that on HP—we paid £40 deposit—that cost £178. As you will understand, the time we had the flat in London we only had the one bedroom and when we were in there we had fitted wardrobes. But before we left London we bought some wardrobes and things second-hand which cost us £35. We had to buy a single bed for the little girl. We bought a gas cooker, too." "Well, I

didn't think the cost would be as much as it was, I mean, I couldn't afford to come down to see the house before we moved into it, so I had no idea what I was coming to, and the size of it nearly knocked me flying when I seen it. I didn't imagine it would be so big. The decorating alone will cost a bomb. I can't see myself getting carpets until the kids start to work at this rate, because it will cost about £300."

Most of the people moving to Milton Keynes or any other similar development do not do so from choice but through necessity. For many, the whole process of moving is fraught with uncertainty and difficulty. To the economic strain of moving and setting up home can be added the social and emotional strains of moving away from long-established relationships and having to make a whole set of new friends.

However, six months on after the move, most people seem to have made the best of it, although a few are disillusioned. The *Household Survey* shows 34 per cent of the migrants felt "very pleased with life here" 44 per cent "quite pleased," 8 per cent "a bit disappointed" and only 3 per cent who wanted to return to their previous community. "From my experience now and what I know, if a friend of mine came from London and he said to me, 'What's my chance of getting a house down here?', well, the first thing I'd turn round to him and say, 'Your chances are good, but you want plenty of money before you start.' Because I never dreamt that the money would go like it did go." "It's been worth it. I'd do it all again to come here. I like it; for a start you've got your own front door. I think that's fantastic. I still can't believe it now, that no one else can come in my front door without me saying so. Well, in London there wasn't anything for the kids really, 'cos there wasn't a park near me; there was no garden they could play in, and they've looked terrific since I've moved here, and everyone says I've been looking marvellous."

The *Milton Keynes Plan* (1970) states that its objective "is to provide homes and jobs for people moving from greater London." Most people it has provided homes for since its designation have been in housing need. Many of them possess few skills and earn lower wages, yet it is precisely these people who suffer most in moving to Milton Keynes. They form a large proportion of newcomers who go there under their own steam rather than with a firm. And, as I have shown, those do not usually get any assistance with visiting the area beforehand, or with temporary accommodation, removal or settling-in costs.

Those who are not very mobile or affluent do not usually get help in coming to the area and seeing the full choice of houses and amenities available before making their decision about moving. The Milton Keynes Development Corporation policy of only allocating a house when a person has a job in the area, (at a time when in Milton Keynes house-building is not keeping pace with new jobs) and giving top priority in housing to those who move with a firm, means that those who can least afford it have to put up with the costs and inconvenience of temporary accommodation for longer—while hanging on to the job which qualifies them for a house.

This means that those who need financial assistance most, start off in the situation of debt and general financial strain. It is they who need cheap furniture, but have not got the cash to buy it and are forced to buy new furnishings at hire purchase prices. To complete the story, those with the greatest financial cost to bear in moving to a new town have the lowest wage-earning potential.

The judge

David M

The influence of the colonial period A radical shift in judicial attitudes is needed

In spite of the heat, the wigs and gowns are the same, calling to mind, as they are designed to do, a continuous legal tradition which has flowed from the times of Bracton and Coke down to the days of Denning. The same venerable old fans have cooled the court room since it was built by the first colonial settlers. The style and the trappings are unchanged by Independence, still little different from the atmosphere in the law courts in the Strand: the stylised legal Latin; the dun law reports; the courtly wit; and the urbane deference paid to the judge. In reality, the changes made in the states of English-speaking Africa since Independence have greatly altered the position of the judge as it developed several thousands of miles away and hundreds of years before. Those alterations are the subject of this article.

Naturally the history of the colonial period left a deep mark on the courts, as on everything else. One factor is that until recently, in east and central Africa at least, justice existed at two levels: the native courts exclusively for the African; and the high courts where "British standards" were kept, largely for the benefit of the settler population.

Another factor affects the respect for constitutionalism, by which I mean the concept of government under law. For most of that period, the governor held virtually unlimited executive power, being responsible only to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in far-away London. When comprehensive constitutions were published, they came and went with such bewildering rapidity that they must have appeared, to the uninitiated, like the rules of some bizarre club rather than the fixed principles within which the government must keep. Thirdly, at the level of personnel, there are still numerous white faces beneath the wigs. The Chief Justice, in at least one country, is a former colonial Attorney General who has prosecuted many senior members of the present government. All this means that in the popular, uneducated mind, the courts remain, to some extent, a "colonialist institution" which is correspondingly less likely to be supported in a tussle with the executive.

The basic ethos of the English legal system is out of place in Africa, at the moment. The idea that once a law gives a person rights, he is automatically able to get up and take advantage of them, if necessary through his day in court, is false in countries where most citizens are uneducated, ignorant and frightened of the court and usually speak its language (English in most cases) as a second language. A person can, of course, go to a lawyer, since Africa has produced so many more lawyers than doctors or engineers. But legal aid is scanty and very few can afford the services of the rapacious private lawyers, whose fees generally are even higher than those in a rich country. One way of meeting these factors in cases where the bureaucracy is involved is to set up an Ombudsman. This has been done in Tanzania, is now being done in Zambia and should be done throughout the rest of Africa.

Typical of the English legal system ethos is the accusatory system of criminal trial, which is used