

his non-English-speaking countrymen. His latest play, *Ngahika Ndenda*—from all accounts, much appreciated by the local Kikuyu—was banned in Kiambu, the heart of Kikuyuland.

The Kenyan government has appeared one of the strongest and most stable in Africa. It might have been thought that it could afford a public dialogue with a man of Ngugi's standing. Instead, it uses the old colonial trick of shutting him away, without reasons, in the hope that he will be forgotten.

However, it didn't work when Kenyatta was the victim. Let's hope it won't work now. The protests from outside are mounting, and Kenya is sensitive to *that* kind of criticism, at least.

Ansaphoney

Perhaps it is still all due to Watergate, perhaps it goes back to the Hollywood star system, or even, if you follow Daniel Boorstin, to the very roots of mass society in America. It's the American urge to belittle their great ones while at the same time enhancing their star quality. It shows in the latest adult toy being offered—celebrity cassettes.

The idea is, if you are a liberal with a touch of vulgarity, to have the politician you love to hate (Richard Nixon) answer your phone for you. A Washington firm is offering a cassette to be recorded on to your telephone answering service (most middle class Americans in business have them) so

Urban zoology

When councils release news of the "first tenant moving in" to one of their properties it is normally with a certain pride, and diffidence was never a Birmingham characteristic anyway. But what the McDonagh family inaugurated last week was the city housing department's human zoo policy, which designates 87 properties in five areas as reserves for "anti-social" families. (There were originally to be seven areas, but residents of Castle Vale and Harborne successfully argued that the experiment should be confined to the less lovable locales of Nechells, Washwood Heath, Perry Barr, and so on.)

The housing department, as well as the Tory chairman of the housing committee, claim that by segregating problem tenants in this way they will be able to protect their own good tenants from bad neighbours, and at the same time supply intensive social work support.

The social services branch of the National Union of Public Employees in Birmingham (NUPPE) disagrees, and has passed a resolution calling on its members not to cooperate. It holds that the scheme runs counter to a central government directive in the code of practice annexed to the Homeless Persons Act, 1977, which warns housing departments against concentrating families with financial and social problems in one area. Certainly, by thus stigmatising and scapegoating the tenants, the house, the street and the area, the housing department must have blighted the prospects of every primary school within walking distance.

Time may show further consequences—if the experiment and Tory control of Birmingham last long enough. But quite apart from the interests of the families directly concerned, Birmingham is itself taking a risk in making its problems quite so visible. A city that saves on the rates by making itself into a laboratory for a deprivation research may expand opportunities for social scientists at the price of more lucrative forms of job creation.

La scandale

Any French citizen living abroad has the right to vote in a parliamentary election. Not only that, but he can choose his constituency, as long as it is a town of over 30,000 inhabitants. Were this electorate (which numbers tens of thousands of voters and tends to be highly conservative) to show an unusually detailed knowledge of French constituency politics, it could make its vote count in the most decisive manner: in constituencies where the governmental majority is in danger of losing its seat, or where the left-wing opposition is sufficiently weak to be shaken by a significant injection of pro-government votes. This year, it appears that someone has decided that it is high time that the expatriate vote was a great deal more carefully organised than it has been in the past.

An organisation called the RFE, the Rassemblement des Français de l'Étranger, ostensibly neutral, but presided over by the gaullist ex-minister, Maurice Schumann, appears to have worked closely with the French Foreign Ministry in the collection and channelling of expatriate voting registrations.

Certainly, French citizens who are living abroad appear oddly unanimous in their choice of constituencies: the French inhabitants of Dakar, Libreville and Monaco, for example, have clairvoyantly opted for the seats of Montpellier and Marseilles where the socialists are only weakly entrenched, whilst their colleagues in Bangkok have chosen Nimes and Auxerre. The French living in Pondicherry have chosen the 8th *arrondissement* of Paris.

Suspicious were aroused in these constituencies when applications for electoral registration were received, not from individual French electors, but in neat parcels from the Quai d'Orsay, filed in the same handwriting. Apparently, instead of the expatriate elector filling out the whole application form for himself, he has been led to fill in only his name and leave the actual choice of the constituency to big brother.

Since the *Canard Enchaîné* recently exposed the affair, the opposition parties have taken up the case. But the most serious and far-reaching investigation is likely to come through the courts.

The government's response, naturally enough, has been to minimise the extent of electoral malpractice, and confine itself to an admission of irregularities in the case of the ambassador to Gabon. But it is unlikely that the Gabon case is unique and still more unlikely that an ambassador or civil servant would take such steps out of personal electoral enthusiasm. In that case, the finger of guilt would be pointed, not just at the Foreign Minister, M. Guiringaud, but at the whole cabinet and eventually at the Prime Minister, Raymond Barre (who is already badly in need of electoral support) and finally, at the *Elysée* itself.

Say that again?

Errata of the week. From *Nature*, 2 February. "We would like to apologise for errors which slipped into the article *Dioxin meeting recommends cancer study* on page 202 of 19 January issue. They resulted from dictation over the phone and subsequent editing, and are amended as follows. The first sentence of the first paragraph should have begun: 'Since the release of the tetrachlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxin (the isomer 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin)'. Try reciting that from a phone box in the Orkneys.

From the Ballet Rambert: "In the press release entitled *Dame Marie Rambert celebrates her 90th birthday*, 'Dance Commander of the British Empire' should read, 'Dame Commander of the British Empire'."

A smell of trouble

Mike Phillips

The city centre in Wolverhampton is no bigger than the average high street shopping centre in London. But on the other side of the ring road, Wolverhampton looks a different place, an impression which is most marked as you walk down Waterloo Road. At the bottom end, you find many of the houses where West Indians and Asians live.

The area is precisely reminiscent of parts of London in the late fifties, Islington, Hackney or Stoke Newington—black faces and all. There's a smell of coal or wood fires in the air, and an evening mist which obscures the vision at 50 yards. Out of the fog the fast lilting singsong of African voices: "Goodnight brother. Be seeing you."

As early as eight in the evening, the area seems deserted. Only two other pedestrians go past along the half mile of Dunstall Avenue. A white woman runs down the middle of the roadway, and entering a house slams the door. A turbaned Asian crosses to the other pavement as he hears the sound of footsteps approaching. The atmosphere is curiously menacing.

There aren't any policemen around. Tonight they're all in the city centre; it's impossible to walk more than 50 yards there without encountering two or three. On the edges of the centre, reserves are parked and ready, restless in their crowded vans. Outside the railway station, there's a Midland Red bus full of policemen, some of them reading, some trying to sleep.

It's the first Friday night since the battle outside the George, and the police are clearly expecting trouble. By half past nine, there seem to be more policemen than casual passers-by on the streets. People at bus stops are the only civilians in sight—apart from small groups of West Indian youths, walking with their usual deliberate, jiving style. There are white youths slouching around, too. Wherever a largish group begins to form, the police can be seen moving on its outskirts, breaking it up, moving them on.

Inside the Crypt on Darlington Street there's dub music as usual. The Crypt is one of the two clubs in Wolverhampton where West Indian youths go. This one runs a Friday night disco. Most of the members look to be between 15 and 17. Tonight the doors are closed. No "strangers" are being admitted. There's a crowd of about 200 boys downstairs. A sprinkling of youths and men from Birmingham are moving around. Everyone's expecting something to happen—an attack, a fight, an arrest. But there's no sense of fear. "We came tonight to show the police that they can't keep black people

out of the centre of Wolverhampton."

The majority of the West Indians in the town come from Hanover in Jamaica. Unlike a group composed of people from different islands, they have the emotional close-knit unity of the village. Among their conclusions, once reached, are firmly held to. A question about last week's events bring a chorus of replies. The accents are mixed, ranging from pure west midlands to rural Jamaica:

"White men been stepping out of line for four years. More than four years. We just had enough. We went in their territory and taught them a lesson."

It's an idea that comes up again and again. Territory, their ground, our ground.



Black and white in Wolverhampton/Andrew Ward, Report

Several people mention the fact that there is no youth facility in Wolverhampton owned or run by West Indians. "The black man don't have anything of his own in this town."

"What about the Ku Klux Klan? Is it true?"

"Is it true? What's wrong with you? They have a white Rover, a white Triumph Toledo and a plain van. Various different cars. But it's the National Front. They're trying to look respectable, so they have disguise their wickedness."

"Anybody seen them?"

"Delroy seen them. Delroy. Forward."

Delroy comes forward. He says he was attacked by three white men who stopped their car and jumped out at him. He ran.

"Does that happen often?"

"Differently. From time to time. Only because of the word, the Ku Klux Klan, that's why the newspapers pick it up. But this thing goes on all the time."

"Mainly police. The bad thing with them is: is in the cell they commit the damage."

"Them parcel out with them colleague. How much blows you should get."

In the town, the well-disposed whites speak of the George incident in the way well-disposed whites speak of such matters. At a church coffee bar: "Merely a fracas between two gangs of youths—not racial—the press, as usual, exaggerated it all." A taxi driver puts it all down to unemployment and mischievous football fans. "They've got to have someone to pick on, you see. It's not our age group. I used to

work with West Indian conductresses on the buses. Lovely girls." A teacher in a pub blames the National Front. "Stirring things up." They're sure it will blow over.

If you talk to West Indian youths, a different picture emerges. The precise reasons for the fight are never mentioned. Instead, when asked about it, they produce a list of specific grievances which are obvious and familiar. Schools, jobs, facilities, and above all a constant drip of racial hostility and tension. "It's at work, too. Most of the black people work at Good-years, and one of the NF candidates works there, too. At work you find out."

The George incident was the third on that scale during the last year. All of them began in relatively trivial incidents, and all of them involved over 100 youths. "I can't tell you it's over, because them youths won't stand for no white man stepping out of line. Before time they used to make it. But not again."

"No. I can't tell you it's over. Let me show you. Any night you come here, you can see about 20 white girls. Tonight, not one. Even them youth that have white girl friends, they leave them at home this weekend. You see, them youth serious."

The Friday night disco goes on for half an hour longer than usual. At around half past ten, the police are shepherding groups of white youths away from the city centre. No trouble. Move along. Back inside the Crypt, Chris, the community relations officer, speaks through the mike. The youths shush each other to listen. "Go home quietly. You've made your point. Come to my office on Monday and I'll show you my correspondence on this matter." They listen intently. "If you're attacked, fight; don't run. If you run, I'll be ashamed."

In the event, it's a quiet night. On Saturday afternoon, there's a demo. It's run by white anti-racists, and black attendance is sparse. Even so, two West Indians are arrested. Later on, in the poly, there's a dispute. West Indians can't understand the left passion for demonstration. "If you're fighting, fight. If you want to stay home, stay home."

Saturday night is quiet again. It's raining steadily; but outside the YMCA in Dunstall Avenue, there are little groups of West Indian youths. Three girls stand at the entrance, chattering in the local accent. The atmosphere seems a lot more relaxed tonight. The Birmingham youth have gone home, but the building is still packed with young West Indians from the Waterloo Road area. Every 15 minutes or so, a police van drifts slowly past.

Inside, the boys are standing around. Some are playing at the football machine and the billiard table, but mostly they just stand there. One carries an axe for self-defence. But he's left it at home because of the police activity. He demonstrates how he carries it in his belt.

"Is it all over?"

"How can it be over? It's over till next time. But they'll start up again soon."

"What will you do?"

"Fight."