

## ENGLISH ACADEMY CONFERENCE 4 - 6 SEPTEMBER 1986

In marking twenty-five years of existence, the English Academy of Southern Africa has called a Conference on English language and literature in South African society, 1961 to 1986.

Given the issues of direct social and political concern at stake in South Africa today, the nature and purpose of this Conference need to be stated clearly.

This Conference is called under the sole aegis of the English Academy. In no way is it associated with either the Republican or Johannesburg Festivals this year. The English language is the prerogative of those who use it and it is their concerns which the Conference intends to pay attention to. Furthermore, the focus of the Conference will not be only retrospective - we of the present must consider the future.

It is intended that the nature of the Conference should be shaped by the participants. Cultural, linguistic, educational, political, industrial and social groups, as well as individuals are expected to attend, where *their* concerns, derived from *their* experience can be expressed.

It is for these reasons that the Conference will not consist of a series of formal papers delivered to a largely passive audience. Instead, opportunities for expression and interchange will be the paramount concern of the organizers.

Suggestions for the shape and nature of the Conference are being sought from many quarters. Individuals and organizations are

encouraged to make proposals for the Conference programme, a programme which will have sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of all interest groups.

Apart from the many regular conferences on writing, drama, language and publishing which take place in South Africa, two conferences need to be kept in mind. The first is the 1974 conference on 'English-speaking South Africa Today' in Grahamstown. There the concerns of English-speaking middle-class whites received overwhelming attention.

Then there is the 1983 conference on 'Culture and Resistance' in Gaborone. At this conference it was decided that the next such gathering should be inside South Africa. This has not happened as yet.

There is no doubt that to launch a conference on English which will have truly wide representation at this time in our history is an ambitious and risky affair. Any number of circumstances could wreck it. To talk language is to talk politics; to talk about the past twenty-five years of English in South Africa is to talk about the present; and to talk about English in the present is to talk about a future in South Africa.

And that is the challenge which this Conference poses.

The English Academy's conference is therefore being planned to be representative, flexible and open. What happens will be largely determined by those who are present. This is the spirit in which advice and suggestions are being sought, and those are the terms upon which the Conference is being planned.

MICHAEL GARDINER  
Conference Organiser  
27 St Andrews Rd  
PARKTOWN  
2193

(011) 642-7373  
648-0729