

OBITUARY

John Wiseman

The Journal of Modern African Studies deeply regrets to announce the death of the Book Reviews Editor, Dr John Wiseman, on 5 March 2000.

John Wiseman, Senior Lecturer in African Politics at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, died of cancer on 5 March 2000, at the tragically early age of 54. John was always proud to have been a product of the Department of Government at Manchester, where he took both his undergraduate degree and his Ph.D. with Bill Tordoff and Dennis Austin between 1968 and 1974, completing his Ph.D. under Bill's supervision on 'The Organisation of Political Conflict in Botswana'. He then taught for three years at Ahmadu Bello University, before taking up what proved to be his lifetime post at Newcastle in 1977.

Sceptical of theory, and moved by a deep love of Africa, John always saw African politics as deriving from the needs, aspirations and struggles of individual Africans, rather than from grand global narratives. This was an approach that encouraged the empathetic and fieldwork-based study of individual African states, first in Botswana, but also in his second African home, The Gambia, while at the time of his death he was working on Malawi. It also led to an interest in leadership, expressed in his *Political Leaders in Black Africa* (1991), and to an abiding conviction that Africans were every bit as capable as anyone else in the world, given half a chance, of managing effective multi-party democracies. This conviction was expressed in his two major books, *Democracy in Black Africa: Survival and Revival* (1990), and *The New Struggle for Democracy in Africa* (1996), as well as an edited volume, *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1995). Fittingly, the last publication before his death was 'The Continuing Case for Demo-Optimism in Africa', *Democratization* (1999).

A lifetime enthusiast, John made an enormous contribution to the study of Africa, as teacher, colleague and friend. His final-year undergraduate course on African politics at Newcastle regularly attracted more than seventy students a year. He was an active member of ASAUK, especially in organising conference panels and

serving on its Executive Committee, and was Book Review Editor first of *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, and from 1997 of *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. He will be deeply missed, both amongst the Africanist community in the United Kingdom, and in those parts of the continent that he knew and loved. A memorial fund has been established, and will be donated to projects in those parts of Africa with which John was most closely associated. Cheques should be made payable to the 'University of Newcastle', and sent to Mrs Joan Davison, Department of Politics, University of Newcastle, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE1 7RU.

Pending the appointment of a new Book Reviews Editor, all reviews and correspondence should be sent to the Editor, Christopher Clapham, at the University of Lancaster.

Christopher Clapham
March 2000