

Heroes of Spelling Reform

Have you ever wondered about the correct spelling of words like accomodation, disappoint, mischievous? If so, you are not alone.

There is a revolution brewing. It can be seen as a revolution agenst the government in a sense.

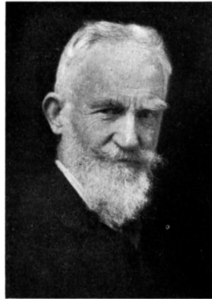
How so? It first figured in the revolutionary proposals of U.S. President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt, known as the Trust Buster, about 1912. He boldly challenged the entrenched power establishment of his time. He initiated the Civil Service Examinations, requiring certain qualifications for government positions.



But he softened the spelling requirements so that no one would be left out because of being a poor speller.

Roosevelt challenged the old ways of spelling English. He said those old conventions were out of date, didn't make good sense, no wonder people couldn't spell them.

The world-famous playwright George Bernard Shaw rote: "The proper way to spell the word "fish" in English — if you followed the phonetic rules — would be "ghoti."



The "ghoti" spelling suggested facetiously by Shaw — based partly on the way **gh** is used to represent **f** in "enough" — has come to be a byword for spelling reformers, to represent how ridiculous many English spellings are.



Benjamin Franklin, the great inventor, was another who decried the faults in inглиsh spelling.

He wrote: The same should be observ'd in all the Letters, Vowels and Consonants, that wherever they are met with, or inwhatever Company, their Sound is always the same.

It is also intended that there be no superfluous Letters used in Spelling, i.e. no Letter that is not sounded." He proposed 6 new letters to improve the English alphabet.

Was he heeded? No, not then. But maybe now it's different?

The great dictionary maker Noah Webster wrote:

"It has been observed by all writers, on the English language, that the orthography or spelling of words is very irregular; the same letters often representing different sounds, and the same sounds often expressed by different letters."



Webster included alternative spellings for some words in his Dictionary, especially in earlier editions, before he backed down & yielded to most of the old conventional spellings. We can guess that he was criticized, in reaction to the earlier editions, for his boldness, his attempt to regularize the spelling of the language somewhat. We have saved his suggestions, though, & many of them eventually were adopted as acceptable or even preferred spellings.

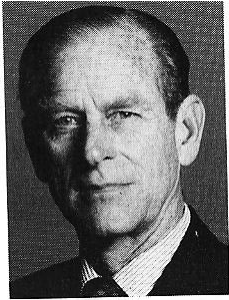
Further words of his: 'Now is the time [for spelling reform] and this is the country.... Letters, the most useful invention that ever blessed mankind, lose a part of their value by no longer being representatives of the sounds originally annexed to them. [The effect is] to destroy the benefits of the alphabet.'

George Orwell, English riter, author of Animal Farm, rote:



"Our existing spelling system is preposterous and must be a torment to foreign students. This is a pity, because English is well fitted to be the universal second language, if there ever is such a thing. Would

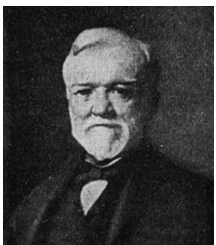
it not be possible to rationalize it little by little, a few words every year?"



Prince Philip of England, consort of Queen Elizabeth II, in an interview in 1964 when he was Duke of Edinburgh:

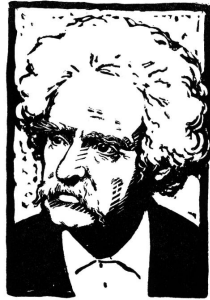
HRH. "I would like very much to see a simplified version of spelling ...introduced for English. There are already... simple alphabets where the same sound is always written in the same way, which of course makes it easier. It's perfectly easy for people who know regular English to use [simplified spelling] - You only have to look at it a little more carefully. And, once you have learnt it.. you can also learn our rather extraordinary way of spelling."

He sed, "As a medium for international communication, I am absolutely convinced that we ought to invent, or use one of these simplified forms of spelling, the rational forms of spelling and pronunciation."



Andrew Carnegie, a scottish immigrant, builder of the US transcontinental railroad & later philanthropist [Carnegie Hall among other things]

gave \$250,000 to start a Simplified Spelling Board. He hoped the result would be an improved spelling sistem, easier for all to learn.



Mark Twain, American writer, jokingly, speaking to AP reporters, Sep. 18, 1906:

'Simplified spelling brought about sunspots, the San Francisco earthquake, and the recent

business depression, which we never would have had if spelling had been left all alone.'

Twain gained fame for his spoof of opponents of spelling reform, in which he set forth the arguments by fictional historic Egyptians who explain why it is absolutely necessary to stay with hieroglyphics as the only proper form of writing, as against those who favor developing an alphabet. Readers realized Twain was inviting comparisons with today's opponents of spelling reform.



In DUTCH: A MEMOIR OF RONALD REAGAN,

Edmund Morris rote:

Reagan retains the /y/ when pluralizing words such as /belly/ and /mystery/, and has a .. habit of writing /nite/ for /night/. White House aides snickered at his insistence on writing /burocrat/ and /burocracy/, unaware that the President was being faithful to the Simplified Spelling reform movement of his youth."

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For further information:

- The Spelling Society, London, UK www.spellingsociety.org
- American Literacy Society, www.americanliteracy.com