



AA NOTES

November – December 1973
News Letter No. 35

THE AA AND SOUTH AFRICA

A report on the information meeting held on November 15

There was a good attendance of supporters of the AA stand on the issue of apartheid in South Africa at the meeting held at Bedford Square chaired by Sir Hugh Casson. The purpose of the meeting was to bring people up to date with more recent developments and to provide an opportunity to exchange information

The meeting began with John Smith, the immediate AA past President, providing a summary of events since the AA's Council decision to boycott South Africa and to preclude AA members from practising there and South Africans becoming members of the Association. (See AA Notes No. 31 and accompanying information sheet referring to the AA Council meeting of January 22, 1973.) This decision was taken as a matter of conscience and the past President had himself informed all existing South African members of the Council's decision. This had led to some resignations from South African members but there were still 44 existing members who, in John Smith's words "may still be proud to belong to the AA". He went on, "those who wish to resign can do so".

At the Council's open session of January 22 a number of South African students had attended and the final resolutions on the AA's firm stand on this issue were tabled. John Smith reiterated these resolutions:

The AA Council

- 1 deplores the apartheid system and its repressive framework,
- 2 considers that the Institute of South African Architects functions within and is of necessity a part of this repressive system,
- 3 considers that the RIBA at present endorses and tacitly supports the activities of the ISAA by reason of:
 - a) its alliance under the Charter and By-laws, and
 - b) its recognition of five South African schools of architecture,
- 4 recognises that the UK makes the largest investment in South Africa and is by virtue of this a beneficiary of the apartheid system, and that professional links form an element of this investment,
- 5 resolves to ask the Council of the RIBA:
 - a) to disconnect its formal links with the ISAA,
 - b) to withdraw its recognition of five South African schools of architecture, and
 - c) in the future to debar from membership of the RIBA architects securing work in South Africa,
- 6 resolves that in future architects practising in South Africa will not be accepted for membership of the AA.

Following John Smith the chairman of the AA Students Union, Henry Gibson, reported on the activities of the student body (a) within the AA School itself (b) in its relations with the RIBA and South African students and (c) in relation to the national campaign to boycott South Africa.

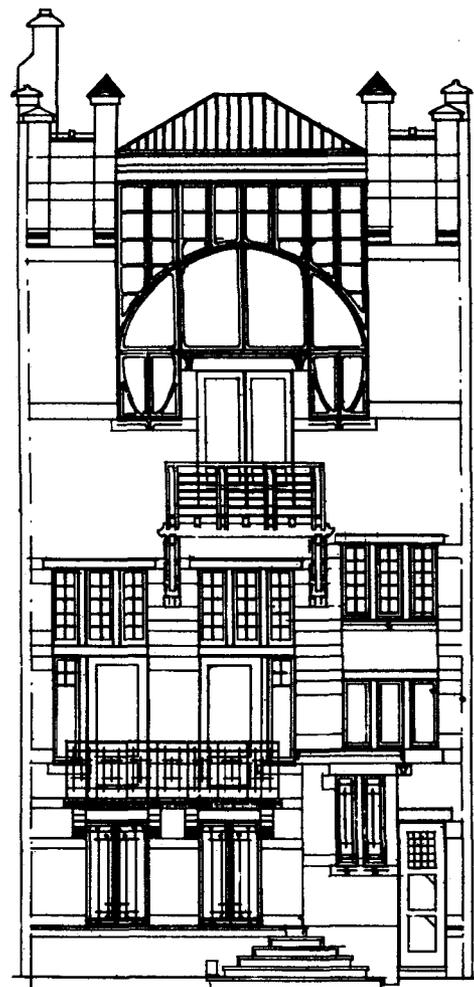
Gibson expressed a satisfaction on behalf of the student body in the positive action taken by the AA Council and reported that while initially the student response was slow in starting by last summer term an intensive campaign was directed towards the RIBA and other unions. The resolutions in support of the AA Council over the South African issue made by the union were circulated to 30 other schools and replies were received from 20 of these schools. The matter was raised at the NUS conference at Exeter and (enterprisingly) the AA union also contacted South African students in Cape Town to gain more information and to enquire what kind of support was required by these students.

Henry Gibson also elaborated on the RIBA's position saying that it provides recognition of 5 South African Schools and pointing out that under the present system graduates from these schools could work in the UK without further training. A British

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BRUSSELS 1900
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PROJECT:
Northampton
County Hall
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Studio House for the painter Bartholome, Brussels, by Paul Hankar 1898. One of the pictures from the forthcoming exhibition 'Brussels 1900' at the AA.

architect conversely would be required to do two extra years training if he went to South Africa to work. Further, he claimed that the present system of election of officers to the ISAA by government nomination goes against the charter and by-laws of the RIBA.

Kate Mackintosh, the next speaker, was introduced as an RIBA vice president but quickly divested herself of that cloak in an outspoken condemnation of the RIBA's position. The RIBA had voted for retention of links with South Africa by 38 votes to 18. She saw human weakness as the chief stumbling block at the RIBA. Typical Council members think of South African member colleagues 'as weak but not evil' — like the Council members themselves in fact! She provided seven arguments that are put forward as 'excuses' for lack of positive action:

- 1 Bridges are positive
- 2 Things are improving
- 3 The RIBA is a professional body with South African representation and the ISAA has no colour bar. (The 'politics and architecture do not mix' argument)
- 4 Any action is marginal
- 5 Any action taken would be a dreadful blow to liberals!
- 6 Schools of architecture cannot be de-recognised
- 7 The RIBA cannot sever relations because of the UIA agreement.

The third official speaker was Graham Page of the RTPI who undertook to explain the activities within the Institute over the last year and his own involvement with the South Wales branch which had convened a special meeting and resolved that South African links should be severed. Eventually the proposition was taken up at the Annual General Meeting of the Institute but no direct break was agreed to. The RTPI Council had debated the matter, he reported, and an External Affairs Committee is to report back to Council on the matter of an Alliance Agreement. This has not yet been done and Page summarised his contribution by indicating that existing contacts were to be used to continue a non-discriminatory policy in relation to planning.

Discussion

After the invited speakers had completed the provision of basic information, Sir Hugh Casson invited the audience to participate in a general discussion of the issues raised. Mitzi Cunliffe was soon on her feet to ask what action the planners were taking over members who were actively engaged in planning projects in South Africa. "Could not pressure be put on these people immediately" she asked? Mr. Page agreed that within the terms of the External Affairs Committee this question was being investigated and that they would have recommendations for the RTPI Council in due course. This was followed by some informative contributions by South African students now studying at the AA who spoke both from their own experiences and from a deeply rooted concern about government policy and permits. It was quickly established that a law relates to South Africans who may wish to leave the country and a permit is required before a job can be taken up abroad. Should the permit holder require to return to South Africa he would probably find that he would become a prohibited person and his situation (as he would presumably also become stateless) was seen as a hopeless one. Another South African student queried paragraph 6 of the AA's resolutions on membership and asked the past president whether this meant totally clearing the AA's board. He also asked for a definition of those who would be excluded from membership if seeking a post in South Africa. Would it for example cover just those people who may be going to South Africa to practice architecture in an office or does it also refer to those who may be taking up short term visiting professorships or lecturing appointments? John Smith in reply said that there was no indication from Council that they wanted to expel existing South African members and he also added — in an unofficial capacity — that the question of visiting teachers and office workers should be interpreted as widely as possible and in his opinion would therefore include anyone accepting any commission from South Africa. The South African students attending the meeting also made it clear that they would support any policy that the AA or other institutions may have for naming names and it was clear from some of the things that were said that the situation in South Africa is worsening all the time and a plea was put forward to accelerate the campaign in relation to growing needs.

Cedric Price with the RIBA Directory in hand attacked the RIBA on the question of members' ethic. "We should", he said, "maintain a personal ethic related to the RIBA's printed Code". A welcome change from the normal run of the discussion was the appearance at this point of a group of African students from Rhodesia who through their spokesman indicated at first hand the problems that are facing non-white architects and students in Rhodesia and in South Africa. These students at Leeds Polytechnic (see letter) gave a very graphic account of their recent escape from the regime in Rhodesia and appealed for support from all quarters in changing the situation in these countries. That the AA had taken such a resolute stand was a very encouraging indication for them of professional opinion. Their aim, they underlined, was to obtain solidarity and support for an oppressed people and to ensure freedom of speech as well as academic freedom.

Further contributions were received which underlined the need to smash racism, and finally the meeting broke up after the following motion was passed:

That this meeting believes that the maintenance of institutional links between professions in this country and in South Africa masks our opposition to apartheid. For this reason, this meeting calls on the RIBA and the RTPI to break off all institutional links and special relationships with South African professional bodies.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

May we, through your paper, express our most profound gratitude to the AA, firstly for inviting us to their meeting on Thursday, 15th November 1973, secondly for giving us a sympathetic hearing and thirdly for supporting us in our campaign to help our colleagues.

We were greatly impressed by the depth of concern about the situation in Southern Africa that members of the AA at that meeting showed, and we were deeply satisfied with the resolutions and decisions made at that meeting.

May we wish you all the best of luck, and assure you of our strong support in your noble endeavour to fight the oppression of the black peoples of Southern Africa. We hope that you will have the courage and determination that are required to make the struggle a success.

Yours faithfully, *Herbert S. Makoni,
Peter C. Mofife, Eveready S. Changata*

'Dependent Countries Self-Determining Group' Seminars

The above group recognizes:

1. That the gap between the developed countries and the under-developed countries is increasing. That the system of aid and experts forms an integral part of the machinery that sustains this widening gap. Consequently, aid and experts are seen as further links in the chain of dependence.

2. The under-developed countries need to be liberated from this artificial wheel of dependence. In this context two important factors could be discerned. The question of self-reliance and self-determination and the question of the relationship to developed countries. A sensible relationship is for the developed countries to relate to the under-developed countries in a supporting role and NOT for the developed countries to relate to their appointed clients set up in the developing countries. The setting up of a client provides the necessary machinery for the continuity of dependence. This model could be seen at a global level in Vietnam or in the setting up of Third World Studies at the AA.

3. In the context of the client, the role of the expert takes various forms. The creation of experts could be associated with quick visits to traditional cultures and the process that churns out a 'thesis'. The 'thesis' acquires a life of its own and transforms the author from a VISITOR to an instant EXPERT. Agencies with aid and funds employ the experts to direct the future of traditional cultures. Thus the origin and sustenance of another trap of artificially maintained dependence.

The fact is that there are people at the AA from under-developed countries who recognize the importance of SELF-RELIANCE and SELF-DETERMINATION and have come together to form the DEPENDENT COUNTRIES SELF DETERMINING GROUP. It is our hope that this group develops the necessary identity which would nourish the forces of self-reliance and self-determination so that what starts now at the AA will be carried out in their own lands. The Group also provides the necessary identity for the developed countries to relate (not to clients) in a co-operative and creative form in the re-construction and prosperity of the traditional cultures.

The Group meets every Wednesday, at 12.45-1.45pm for the preparation of a study session (working lunch) and Thursdays at 5.30 pm, using the Planning Department lecture hall, for study-sessions. Bibliography and references will be provided at these study-sessions.

The meetings are open to all those who are interested.

Fitzroy Ponniah (Sri Lanka)
Maria Luiza Carvalho (Brazil)
Stan Panasewicz (Venezuela)
Winston Whyte (Jamaica)

Please contact Fitzroy at the Architectural Association if any further information is required.