

feeling in the office that architecture is not about technology, it is about space, and it isn't about sculpture because you're not so much looking at an object as actually moving through it. So that the experience of moving through space which compresses and expands and directs you and lights you as a complex arrangement is what we think of as architecture. It is not a flexible shed serviced on the outside. You could argue therefore that it's a rather craftsmanlike building."

Not the least of the problems that beset the architect, the contractor and indeed the management of the new theatre were the delays experienced during recent years. There seem to have been as many abortive opening dates for the National Theatre as retirement announcements for Frank Sinatra.

Many of the delays were, according to Lasdun, political. His office had to take a very responsible attitude to haphazard cut-backs and economies. "A great part of these delays was due to the constant monitoring of public expenditure and the time that was taken to redesign the building every time that someone said we had to cut £600 000 off, or another three quarters of a million—these were political figures. Somebody felt that it shouldn't cost as much as it did and this meant overhauling the design three, four, five, six times. It's been an enormous strain purely to keep the cost down. So far from being an expensive building, it is very low cost."

#### Rock bottom budget

Asked about the total cost of the National Theatre, Lasdun replied: "With all the knowledge we had from the analysis of the quantity surveyor, that building is absolutely rock bottom budget, and it is one of the cheapest theatres in the world. It had rather less spent on it than a provincial theatre in Germany... it is a very, very low cost job."

The low costs and the stringent economies have not, according to Lasdun, led to any diminution in the quality of the public spaces in the theatre, but on the other hand "the mechanical services have been dangerously cut and the comfort conditions inside the dressing rooms are possibly not so luxurious or as decent as they should be. The offices were done on a shoe string."

Besides the nervousness about high capital cost buildings by successive governments and the GLC, a considerable amount of criticism has been made in the provinces about the concentration of so much talent and money in one centre in London.



Left: The scenery workshop which runs along the south side of the building with service access from Upper Ground.

Below left: The spaces in the foyer are varied in size and designed to maintain the atmosphere generated by the play.

Below: Office on the north-east corner of the building.

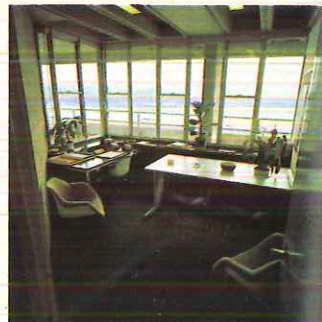


Lasdun, who speaks as the architect of the building and not as somebody with a say in national theatrical policy, is sympathetic to this "very strong" regional argument.

But he looks at it somewhat differently: "I think I'm right in saying that where the argument became unnecessarily severe, was in thinking that had there not been a national theatre the regional theatres would have got any more money. This would not have been the case. They would not have got the money that was voted to the National Theatre—it was only for the National Theatre. I regard the National Theatre as

part of the regional theatre. I have never regarded the two things as mutually contradictory. I expect to see the regional theatres come to the National Theatre, and I expect the National Theatre to go out to the regions. There seems to me to be nothing wrong with England, whose genius excels in literature and drama, having a national home for what it's very good at doing."

Notwithstanding the broad cultural context in which Denys Lasdun and his partners work, any discussion inevitably returns to the question of architecture and to the aims and responsibilities of the office. He



concluded: "We are after all only the architects of the scheme. Given the National Theatre to do, the prime task was to give them what we think was wanted. We've done our best to do that and within the cost. That is the task of an architect."

#### Credits

**Building Owner:**  
South Bank Theatre Board

**Architects:**  
Denys Lasdun & Partners

**Structural and Services Consultants:**  
Flint & Neill

**Quantity Surveyors:**  
Davis Belfield & Everest

**Stage Engineering, Lighting and Sound:**  
Theatre Projects Consultants Limited

**Acoustical Consultants:**  
Sound Research Laboratories Limited (Successor to Henry R Humphreys)

**Catering Consultants:**  
Cornwell Greene Bertram Smith & Co

**Graphic Design Consultant:**  
Ken Briggs

**Building Contractor:**  
Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons Limited

**National Theatre photographs:**  
James Holmes

# VIEWPOINT

## HANSOM



### There's nothing new

Eric Heffer's proposal for a national construction corporation (*Building* 3 September) prompted me to consult Michael Foot's book *Aneurin Bevan 1945-1960*.

Bevan, of course, spent five years as a housing minister in Labour's post-war government. He and his officials at the Ministry of Health, Foot writes, were suspicious of the Ministry of Works which had become during the war something of an embryo Ministry of Housing on its own.

There were some inside MOW who thought that the mobile labour force organisation, set up to deal with emergencies, should be developed into "a mammoth Housing Corporation capable of operating, no doubt alongside the local authorities, on a big scale over the whole country".

Such a "grandiose conception" would have attracted the headlines but, according to the present Leader of the House of Commons, Bevan was convinced it would not build the houses. "The giant would be musclebound." Moreover, it is known that he became suspicious of the Ministry of Works: "rightly or wrongly, he felt its officials were too much at the mercy of big business, the big building contractors and—whisper it not at Transport House—the building trade unions".

Perhaps Eric Heffer should talk over his ideas for a public construction corporation with Michael Foot, as well as with one of the keen young men then active in the Labour Party research department like, say, Peter Shore, now Environment Secretary.

### Defending principals

The RIBA seems to be having a good deal of trouble lately with commissions of one kind or another. I hear that it has failed, for a second time, to convince the Prices Commission that a principal's time is worth more than £5 an hour.

On the face of it there seems to be ample justification for an increase. Using the same formula that is used to calculate the charges for an assistant's time, a charge of £5 an hour represents an annual salary of around £3500. Even a partially qualified assistant, straight from college, can these days command more than that.

I gather that the Commission's letter of refusal hints that an increase may well be appropriate, but that the evidence presented by the RIBA does not come up to scratch. Photocopies of the 1973 and 1975 earnings surveys will not do, it seems. But at least they were sent in on time, which must be some relief remembering the fiasco over the lost evidence to the "corruption commission".

### On the scales

I was relieved to hear that the ammunition used by the RIBA in that other great battle—with the Monopolies Commission—was of a much higher calibre.

The team went into bat in late July, and although the proceedings remain confidential satisfied murmurs are coming from those who know about these things. The deputation, impressively led by Andrew Derbyshire, went in as hard as it could on the case for mandatory fees and felt collectively that it had made a favourable impression on the commission.

The political tide may be running against mandatory fee scales, but at least it would be of some consolation to the profession to know that, if the worst comes to the worst, the case did not go by default.

### Modest Majundar

John Weston, when he was Director of Building Research Station, used to insist that the station should be judged on its results and not on the basis of its research programme at any particular time.

One that did hit the jackpot was the invention of a glass fibre that could be used to reinforce cement. Pilkington's now

sell it as Cemfil but it was Dr Amal Majundar of BRS who first thought it possible and tried—without success—to sell it to manufacturers here and in the US.

The BBC TV programme *The Risk Business* told Majundar's story last week and contrasted the vast potential of the new GRC composite with the modest Majundar, who is still at BRS but now working away quietly on other ideas. Those with a sense of justice will be pleased that his work has not been totally without personal reward as he was given a special merit promotion.

### All in the family

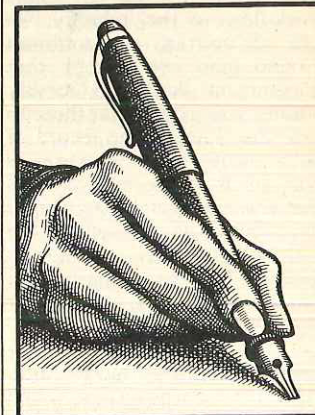
Last week Britain's contract furnishers launched a new name and a new logo. The Contract Furnishing Association added British to its name and announced the result of a competition held to find a replacement for its old-style, rather whimsical logo (top).



The winning design (bottom), by (the very pretty) Mrs Pennie Cooper, certainly reflects the more austere circumstances in which BCFA members, and all of us for that matter, find themselves nowadays.

The new symbol's merits are obvious for all to see. I understand that it is purely a coincidence that Mrs Cooper is married to the designer of the previous logo.

## LETTERS



Letters for publication should be addressed to: The Editor, *Building*, PO Box 135, 4 Catherine Street, London WC2B 5JN. The Editor reserves the right to shorten letters if necessary unless correspondents specify otherwise.

Sir, — The holidays over, *Building* starts a new season on 3 September with lively editorial and comment and none more stimulating of response than Eric Heffer's view from Westminster on his solution to the long term problems of the construction industry.

His proposals given with a disarming sincerity are surprisingly misconceived for one of those rare Members of Parliament who has had actual experience of working in the industry.

Speaking of the industry's workforce, he says that they may have a loyalty to the industry but the majority have no loyalty to a company or firm so that sites become a jungle where employers and employees fight for survival.

This is hardly the picture which the facts suggest, where less time is lost from strikes than in any other industry and where there has been only one major stoppage in 20 years. How different from the history of the Dock Labour Scheme which he suggests as an alternative.

"It is not a good thing that the industry should be fragmented," he says. Presumably because as such it resists the monolithic organisation of labour. But labour has no inclination to be centrally organised. It is the very flexibility and variety of the industry and the scope it offers for in-