



**IF CRIME DOESN'T
PAY... WHERE DO
ARCHITECTS GET
ALL THEIR MONEY?**

ARC

By Edward Bottoms

'IF CRIME DOESN'T PAY': THE ARCHITECTS' REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL



Previous page: ARC
Poster; 'If Crime
Doesn't Pay...' c1975.
AA Archives; Left: ARC
Press Conference,
c1975

In early 1974 a group of radical architectural students operating under the guise of the 'Architects' Revolutionary Council' (ARC) announced their presence to the world, staging a dramatic press conference and publishing an inflammatory manifesto. Calling for the destruction of the RIBA and the establishment of 'an international movement towards community architecture', the ARC emerged from the AA's Intermediate Unit 1, tutored by the charismatic Brian Anson.¹ Little documentation of this movement remains within the AA, however a series of their provocative posters and graphics, key weapons in the ARC armory, are now in the process of being preserved and catalogued in the AA Archive, thanks to generous funding from the AA Student Forum.

The leading protagonists of ARC appear to have been Anson, formerly the Deputy Principle Planner for the GLC's Covent Garden Team, (dismissed in 1971 for taking up cudgels on behalf of the Covent Garden community), and students including George Mills, Peter Moloney, Andy Burrell, Dave Taylor, Adam Purser, Dag Fasting, Hubert Puig and Brian Fileman. In addition there was also 'an international contingent from Slovenia...Croatia, America, France, Germany, the West Indies and other sundry souls.'² A photograph of an ARC press conference circa 1975 reveals the group to have been acutely aware of their own image seated surrounded by banks of TV monitors, the key members sporting dark glasses, against a backdrop of their own posters. Whether a certain amount of irony was intended is unclear, but in their statement of intent, the group defined themselves as 'not composed of self interested reformists, indulgent radicals or opportunist students and academics. The members of ARC

are architectural revolutionaries, and when words such as destroy, enemy and overthrow are employed, they are meant.'

Certainly, ARC became seriously involved in a number of important community issues between 1974 and 1977, mobilising on behalf of the Covent Garden Residents Association, the Ealing Alliance (opponents to Ealing Council's town centre plans) and the Pope Street Association of Bootle, Merseyside. A series of journals, *Red House*, *The Wild Duck* and *The Colne Valley News* were also published, featuring articles, critiques and reviews.

The ARC's philosophy was based around the belief that architects should immediately cease working 'only for a rich powerful minority or the bureaucratic dictatorship of Central and Local Governments and offer... [their] skills and services for the local community.'³ The RIBA was thus regarded as a bitter enemy 'directly responsible for the malaise of architecture and the state of our cities.'⁴ In ARC's view, the RIBA was totally subservient to privileged patronage, an opinion forcefully articulated in a poster representing the institution as HMV's 'Nipper' held in thrall by the voices of developers, speculators, industry, banks and multinationals. Indeed, the RIBA was ruthlessly pilloried in the ARC's graphic output, savagely characterised in another poster as a corpulent, holstered, belted and jackbooted figure touting a bow-tie and bearing aloft, on a T-square, the words 'Repressive, Indulgent, Brutal, Arrogant'. Such militaristic and fascistic imagery was continued elsewhere, an eagle and laurel wreath dominating the RIBA crest in their 'If Crime Doesn't Pay...' poster. Such imagery was well calculated to express ARC's exhortation to 'Join the Resistance'.



This page: ARC Recruitment Poster, vilifying the RIBA, c1975. AA Archives
Opposite: ARC Manifesto, as reproduced in AA Prospectus 1974/5

Indeed, class war was at the heart of ARC and Anson's philosophy, and they were violently opposed to the imposition by architects and planners of 'middle-class values on a [working class] culture entirely different and worlds apart from their own'.⁵ 'We wish to create a situation whereby every time a student passes a building such as Centre Point he vows that he will never work in a practice that is involved in such obscenities. Whenever a student walks through a gentrified area where massive improvement grants

have enabled landlords to evict long standing tenants and raise the value of their property a hundredfold, he will vow never to work in firms that indulge in such activities.'⁶

The arrival of ARC on the architectural scene was reported rather snootily by the *Architects' Journal* of 28 May 1975, which noted that 'in a long, prolix and rather ungrammatical explanatory note, the ARC explains that "the new system of architecture will need to be based on a mass movement" but the revolutionary council does not

Revolutionaries present their draft manifesto

THE ARCHITECTS Revolutionary Council, formed last year by AA lecturer Brian Anson and other architects, has produced a draft manifesto calling on architects to offer skills and services direct to local communities.

The manifesto, presented to a meeting at the Architectural Association this week, says:

□ "ARC calls on all those architects and others involved in the built environment who believe that we should cease working only for a rich powerful minority or the bureaucratic dictatorship of Central

and Local Governments and offer our skills and services to the local communities who have little chance to work directly with architects and architecture.

□ ARC maintains that the architectural profession as it now stands is a luxury profession often reserved only for the rich minority and that the architect is caught in the trap of narrow economic viability and profit.

□ ARC further maintains that the RIBA propagates this narrow luxury characteristic and is thus directly responsible for the malaise of architecture and the state of our cities.

□ ARC believes that there are many thousands of architects who would welcome a new framework where they can work directly for the local communities who are the real clients.

□ ARC specifically believes

that the students in schools of architectures cry out for a new system to replace the existing one where they are trained fodder for the profit-orientated one we now have.

□ ARC believes that the problems for architects are all around us but that the people who suffer from these problems cannot afford to employ architects to help solve them; neither can architects afford to tackle them. It is this trap that ARC wants to break

□ ARC consequently believe that it is necessary to change the social system under which architects work. But first architects and students must demonstrate that they wish a new system in their own art.

□ ARC calls on these people to join a new international movement and through solidarity help to bring about the architectural revolution."

regard itself as the embryo of the movement. ARC is, as it were, the midwife which will help to bring the movement into being, after which it will adopt the role of stern tutor to ensure that the movement does not become a bureaucracy intent on preserving itself to the detriment of society.’ Further media attention was drawn to the aims of the movement, when *The Times* reported, in July 1976, ARC’s disruption of the RIBA’s annual conference at Hull, where two activists interrupted Eric Lyons’ Presidential Address, deriding the conference for ‘being a ‘ridiculous jamboree’ and a ‘sham’ and accused architects of failing with planning in such places as Liverpool and Glasgow, and of ignoring housing needs.’⁷

In addition to such guerilla activities, an ARC conference was arranged in Harrogate which bore fruit in the formation of yet another body, the ‘New Architecture Movement’. Anson retained his combative approach into the late 1970s, an article in the 1977 Aa Prospectus declaring his opposition to both ‘the new breed of conceptualist architects’, whom he considered ‘blind to the fact that in Britain thousands are still forced to live in ugly and poverty-stricken environments’ and to the architects of ‘Authoritarian Left’, who acted ‘as though such people ‘live by bread alone’ and have no capacity for dreaming of beautiful things.’ Later that academic year he was to hijack Peter Cook’s launch of ‘An indiscrete architecture of the bourgeoisie’ by distributing through the audience a statement entitled ‘An immediate response to Peter Cook’s Arcadian thing’. The AA Events List of the following week reported that it ‘commented, in his [Anson’s] way, on contradictions and outward rhetorical devices he felt existed in the scheme and challenged Peter Cook to a public debate of his architecture.’⁸ This challenge was accepted by Cook and a date set for 31 May of that year – an event which must have been entertaining in the least. However, by late 1978 ARC seems to have finally lost momentum and, with the closure of Anson’s Diploma Unit in the summer of that year, the movement appears to have petered out. Brian Anson remained connected to the AA for a further year, working part time as the Diploma School Advisor to Extension Studies and maintaining an open atelier in the basement of No. 11 Percy Street. If any members have ephemera or publications relating to the Architects’ Revolutionary Council and would consider donating them to the AA Archive, they would be most gratefully received.

Edward Bottoms is the AA archivist/web/serials librarian

NOTES

- 1 Brian Anson started Unit 1 in 1971 but was teaching Diploma 8 by 1977/8
- 2 Email from Peter Moloney to Edward Bottoms, dated 8 September 2007
- 3 AA Prospectus, 1974/5, p3. ARC Manifesto, draft version.
- 4 Ibid, p3
- 5 Ibid, p3
- 6 AA Events List, Week 21 (18–21 March), 1974
- 7 The Times, July 16 1976, p7
- 8 AA Events List, week 6 (29 May–2 June), 1978



Above: ARC Recruitment Posters (detail), c1975. AA Archives

Opposite page: Top Left and Right: ARC Recruitment Posters, c1975. AA Archives Bottom Left: ARC Poster promoting their periodical, Red House, c1975. AA Archives; Bottom Right: Poster advertising lecture by Brian Anson, 20 November 1974. Courtesy AA Archives

