

## LABOUR PARTY & ARCHITECTURE - A REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH

This short document is aimed at raising awareness in Labour Party members of the problems caused by modern architecture, and it is proposed the Labour Party adopts a policy to overcome these problems.

The doyen of architectural historians, Vincent Scully is quoted as saying 'whenever we see a building being demolished, we automatically expect it will be replaced by something worse.' Many people would take this to mean that a non-modern building is to be replaced by a modern one.

Modern architecture is the architectural manifestation of modernism, a general art movement that appeared in various guises towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – definition of modernism: modern artistic or literary philosophy and practice; **especially a self-conscious break with the past** and a search for new forms of expression.

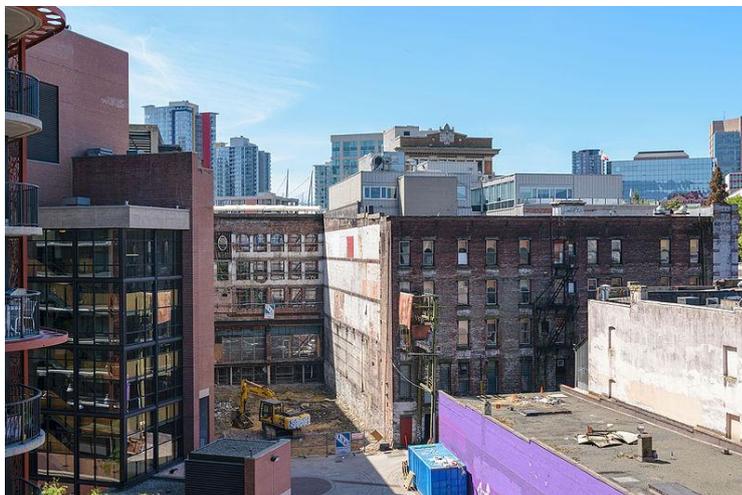
The architectural version meant that pitched roofs became flat, all decoration of buildings was banned, concrete, steel and glass were the preferred materials and buildings were to be simple forms, mainly boxes.

Although the three father figures of modern architecture, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe started designing modern architecture just after WWI, modern architecture only came into its own after WWII. This was for two reasons. Firstly WWII had wreaked widespread destruction over much of the planet, and secondly, by devious means, architects whose creed was modernism, had inveigled themselves into positions of power. This was mainly done from America by founders Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, who had left Nazi Germany to become professors in America, and by the books of Le Corbusier. So in place was a new generation of modern architects who 'rather than mourning the devastation of the cities, saw it as the opportunity they had all been waiting for.'<sup>1</sup>

So following the diktats of architectural modernism, the buildings still standing were swept away in a second wave of destruction and plain boxes of concrete and steel, of different sizes, spread across British cities.<sup>2</sup> The prototype for housing was the Standard Large Scale Housing Unit (often referred to as the Unité) designed by Le Corbusier. It was completed in 1952.



Rapidly, isolated tower blocks sprang up all over Britain, whose many shortcomings soon became apparent. But so blinkered were the architects that complaints were ignored, and tower-blocks, as they became known, continued to be built in their hundreds. Quite rapidly this new modern vision deteriorated into urban blight, something familiar to most people living in Britain.



<sup>1</sup> Keith Lowe, The fear and the freedom.p104

<sup>2</sup> And in cities all over the world.

Soon the unthinkable became thinkable, and in increasing numbers tower blocks of failed social housing were demolished by blowing them up; thus creating a new wave of destruction.

In spite of what most people would have considered a damning critique of their vision, architects were undeterred. They had another prototype, this time for offices; it was the Seagram Tower in New York, a glassy tower designed by Mies van der Rohe. Completed in 1958, it was the most expensive office block ever built. Unable to learn anything, architects copied, and still copy, producing versions of the master's work, which gather in herds in hundreds of cities, creating totally inhumane cityscapes. Nowadays it is common to see the glassy towers deformed into slightly odd shapes.



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Satiated by their arrogance and impervious to the slightest criticism, architects march on into their vision of heaven and most peoples' vision of hell. With developing technology, now almost any shape, however idiotic, can be constructed.



And not content with filling urban spaces with people-hating objects, perfectly acceptable normal buildings are now desecrated to get the attention that architects crave.



Of course none of this could be built without the acquiescence of politicians, at all levels, who provide funding, frame planning laws and overrule objections. They come from all parts of the political spectrum. Much initial architectural damage was done by the Conservative Harold Macmillan, when acting as Housing Minister in the early 1950s, but Labour politicians like Richard Crossman, John Silkin, Ken Livingstone and Lord Prescott have also had a negative impact. Indeed one of the most prominent modern architects, Richard Rogers – Lord Rogers - is a Labour peer.

Reams of research show that modern architecture does not fulfil human beings basic emotional needs; this is clearly evidenced by ‘historic centres’ of cities being magnets for millions of people. While most political parties, including the Labour party, are opposed to all forms of environmental damage, no party has any awareness that architects are polluting the planet.

What is needed is a radical approach, to tell architects that enough is enough and people will no longer tolerate the soulless public spaces and ugly and aggressive buildings they design, and to tell politicians, at all levels, to stop facilitating it.

**HUMAN VALUES MUST BE BROUGHT BACK TO DOMINATE ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM - IF THAT REQUIRES A NEW ROUND OF DESTRUCTION, THEN SO BE IT**

### **Further Information**

#### **Organisations**

CNU - <https://www.cnu.org/>

INTBAU - <http://www.intbau.org/>

Create Streets - <http://dev.createstreets.com/>

#### **Further reading**

Adam, Robert (2010) – *The 7 Sins of Architects* – Adam Publishing

Alexander, Christopher (1977) – *Pattern Language* – Oxford University Press

Blake, Peter (1977) – *Form Follows Fiasco* – Little, Brown & Co.

Brolin, Brent C (1976) – *The Failure of Modern Architecture* – Van Norstand

Coleman, Alice (1985) – *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* – Hilary Shipman

Curl, James S (2018 – forthcoming) – *Making Dystopia* – OUP

Hellman, Louis (1986) – *Architecture for Beginners* – Unwin

Hellman, Louis (2001) – *Architecture A-Z* – John Wiley

Jacobs, Jane (1961) – *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* – Penguin

Krier, Léon (2009) – *The Architecture of Community* – The Island Press

Millais, Malcolm (2009) – *Exploding the Myths of Modern Architecture* – Frances Lincoln

Millais, Malcolm (2017) – *Le Corbusier, the Dishonest Architect* – Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Rudofsky, Bernard (1964) – *Architecture Without Architects* – Academy Editions

Salingaros, Nikos A (2004) – *Anti-architecture & Deconstruction* – Umbau-Verlag

Salingaros, Nikos A (2006) – *A Theory of Architecture* – Umbau-Verlag

Watkin David (2001) – *Morality and Architecture Revisited* – University of Chicago Press

Wolfe, Tom (1981) – *From Bauhaus to Our House* – Picador