

# Sources for construction history in the library of the Trades Union Congress

by Christine Coates

A joint library was first established by the Trades Union Congress (T.U.C.) and Labour Party in 1922, bringing together the papers, pamphlets and official reports collected by the Labour Party Information Bureau, T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee and the Women's Trade Union League. In 1956 the T.U.C. moved to Congress House in Bloomsbury, bringing the greater part of the joint library with it. The subject coverage of today's library reflects the wide-ranging interests and activities of the T.U.C. itself, but it is our holdings of trade union publications which are of most interest to visitors.

The library also houses two special collections: the John Burns Library, comprising mainly nineteenth century labour, socialist and radical books, pamphlets and periodicals, and the Gertrude Tuckwell Collection on women workers from 1900 to 1920. In addition we hold a small photograph library and a collection of historical artifacts, which includes the trade union emblems and badges of various unions in the building trade.

T.U.C. policies in relation to housing and the construction industry can be traced primarily through its publications and the Annual Congress reports, which contain not only verbatim debates but also the General Council's report on activities during the previous year. The minutes of General Council meetings and of its various Standing Committees provide more detail. T.U.C. publications, including the Congress Reports, and the T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee and General Council minutes have been available in microform for several years and may be examined in the national and major academic libraries. The filming of T.U.C. Committee Minutes is in progress.

All unpublished papers including minutes and correspondence are held in a separate Filing Department and, although not general-

ly available to the public, individual applications for access are considered subject to a 30 year rule. The files include correspondence from trade unions and pressure groups.

The publications of unions affiliated to the T.U.C. have been collected systematically. There are good holdings of journals, reports, rulebooks and pamphlets from all the unions active in the construction industry during this century, including those trades which amalgamated long ago to form the present-day unions, such as the Transport and General Workers Union and the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians. There are also five general files of press cuttings from 1922 to 1951 on building trade unions.

As might be expected, the library holds a mass of material reflecting the T.U.C.'s concern for working conditions in the industry. Sources on the National Joint Council (the main negotiating machinery in England and Wales) and its predecessor commence with the *Proposal for a builders national industrial parliament* drawn up by twelve unions in 1916, and include reports from 1921 and the London Working Rule Agreement from 1942.

Other material on pay and working conditions includes official reports (e.g. the Earnings and Labour Inquiry of 1906) and pamphlets by various pressure groups urging improvement in safety standards (although it should be noted that most of our health and safety collection dates from the 1970s). Pressure for expansion in training and apprenticeships (particularly during World War II) is shown by a series of publications from unions and from organisations such as the Building Apprenticeship and Training Council.

Pamphlets on the controversial issue of direct labour range from early titles such as *The danger of socialism through the agency*

of local authorities and the fallacy of direct labour, (1928) right up to the current debates on contracting-out. There are several publications, including the journal *Building Guildsman*, from the National Building Guild, which sought to spread the ideas of Guild Socialism and workers' control through the industry.

Material on working conditions in other countries is very patchy, but it does include reports of the International Labour Office Building, Civil Engineering and Public Works Committee from 1946, and various publications and periodicals of the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers, including *Bauarbeiter-Internationale* (1920-1929).

The Library has a collection of material on the economic structure and development of the construction and building materials industries, particularly in both post-war reconstruction periods, but much of this consists of official reports and publications available elsewhere. Non-official publications mainly cover arguments around centralised planning and nationalisation. There is little technical material except in relation to health and safety issues and specific areas of research and development (e.g. reports of the Building Research Board and the Research Station).

Of more interest to C.H.S. members might be the large collection of material on housing policy. From the 1900s, there are many pamphlets indicating concern over the condition of working class housing in both urban and rural areas and its link with poor health and 'social problems'. T.P. Ritzema, *How to re-house the working classes and save 200,000 lives per year* (1909) is a typical example. Post-war slum clearance campaigns and the garden city movement produced a mass of literature arguing that an expansion in house building would help solve the unemployment problem. This enthusiasm for new towns and suburban housing estates had by the 1930s produced a rival concern over the social problems inherent in their design, and the need for construction of community centres, etc. Illustrative of this period are the numerous

publications from town planning associations and the *Design for Britain* series in the 1940s.

The John Burns Library was the Liberal M.P.'s personal collection and is not confined to labour history. The catalogue therefore includes such items as *The gentleman and tradesman's complete assistant or the whole art of measuring and estimating made easy*, (1781); *Crosby's builder's new price book*, (1841); the balance sheets of the London Building Labourers' Strikes 1859-60 and 1896; various union (and anti-union) publications; and pamphlets by hygiene reformers on 'housing the poor'<sup>1</sup>. The Library also holds a large collection of Robert Owen's works including his schemes for 'villages of cooperation' and plans for the communities at New Lanark and New Harmony.

The Gertrude Tuckwell Collection includes several files (mainly of press cuttings) on wartime housing problems which would be useful, notably 'Housing and hostels for women 1910-1919', and material on garden cities and accommodation for munition workers<sup>2</sup>.

The T.U.C. Library is open to visitors Monday-Friday, 10 am - 5 pm by appointment only. Enquiries should be addressed to the Librarian, Trades Union Congress, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS (Tel: 01 636 4030).

#### *Trades Union Congress Library*

#### References

- 1 John Burns Library, TUC, classified catalogue entries 69; L 123.6; L 150(41): 69.
- 2 Tuckwell Collection, TUC, files 611, 615, 670

# Construction history and urban sites: recent work by the Venetian school on the construction history of Venice during the Long Renaissance

by Donatella Calabi\*

For several years now 'Venice during the Long Renaissance' has been one of the research topics pursued by the Department of the History of Architecture at the University Institute of Architecture, Venice (I.U.A.V.). In that historical period we see plans and pressure for urban renewal, opposition and resistance, religious ferment, material interests, developments in construction, technique and science, and rivalry both between 'engineers' and 'architects' and between theory and practice. From this a central chapter in the history of the city republic of Venice and its construction now emerges in a new light, while overall the research project has also been regarded as an experiment in historiography.

In the first part of this article I shall make a brief point-by-point summary of the main topics being investigated in this project. In the second part I shall look in more detail at the book by Ennio Concina, *L'Arsenale della Repubblica di Venezia* (Milan 1984), which I think exemplifies our studies.

#### The project

The list of 'objects' or titles of research projects which follows should be seen not so much in terms of inherent links between the various items as in terms of a group of topics being explored by similar methods. These latter require a short prefatory comment.

The guiding principles behind our studies are the aspiration to rigour in relating what took place and in analysing what was constructed (be it sign, text or image) and the equally rigorous pursuit of the complex causation of these phenomena. Buildings, drawings and documents are used as sources,

as instruments of perception or interpretation. In this sense the method, insofar as there is one, depends on the subject of each individual 'history': advance judgements and all-embracing assumptions are as pointless and irritating as they are impossible to sustain.

The first topic of study, seen in the writings of Manfredo Tafuri and Antonio Foscari, has included architecturally significant buildings, and through them the interlinking connections between politics, science and architectural knowledge; the links and conflicts between the technical and the institutional from the Middle Ages to the modern age are also involved. Important here are the plans drafted by the *provi* (technical staff working for the republic as salaried officials attached to one of the magistracies), including Giorgio Spavento, Bartolomeo Bon, Tullio Lombardo, and also some of the Venetian work of Jacopo Sansovino.

The main projects were the church and convent of San Salvatore (which stands at the Grand Canal end of the Mercerie, the main route to the St Mark's complex), the Scuola della Misericordia, the Palazzo Grimani at S. Samuele, the church of S. Martino and above all the church of San Francesco della Vigna. In all cases the final outcome of the project depended on the weight exerted by the commissioners of the various buildings (whether they were special in any way, cultivated or representative of a particular tendency, like the Grimani family or the Doge Andrea Gritti), on the relative ascendancy in Venice of

\*Translation by John Millerchip and Mark Swenarton