

international working-party for
documentation and conservation
of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the
modern movement

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OPEN LETTER

Dear Madam,

Finsbury Health Centre

Thank you for your letter of 27 February in reply to mine of 16 February 09.

You refer to extra complication resulting from the referral to the Secretary of State of the proposed closure of the FHC, and promise me a considered reply in due course. I now understand from reports in the press that discussions are to take place in Islington on the future of the FHC, and I would hope that our view can be considered.

I referred in my previous letter to the precedent of the contemporary Central Dispensary in Barcelona by José Luis Sert which, like the FHC, was a symbol in the 1930s of the aspiration for universal social provision, and which, following the death of Franco, was completely restored and remains in medical use (no longer restricted to the tuberculosis for which it was originally designed).

The papers given at the Rotterdam DOCOMOMO International conference in 2008 are now available and include one by Martin Capeluto and María Turull specifically devoted to the restoration or reconstruction of the three projects in Barcelona symbolic of the Republican period there, all associated with Sert and his colleagues on GATCPAC, the Catalan modern architectural grouping of the time. I enclose a copy. The three projects were: the Casa Bloc social housing scheme, the Central Anti-tuberculosis Dispensary, and the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris World Fair, for which Picasso painted the Guernica and where it was first exhibited.

As recorded in the paper, the first two have been restored and are in use effectively as originally intended, and the last has been reconstructed in facsimile. Catalans clearly regard these projects as of high symbolic importance not only in their structure but in their use. The facilities built by the remarkable Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury in the same period in face of the threat of fascism, as documented by John Allan in his magnificent account of Lubetkin and Tecton, surely have comparable symbolic importance. Their future should not be seen in purely utilitarian terms. They are of high importance as symbols of the struggle for social justice and every effort should surely be made to maintain them in the high social purposes for which they were built. We in DOCOMOMO-UK, with our colleagues in 53 other national groups, hope that the future of the Finsbury Health Centre can be seen in these terms.



James Dunnett MA RIBA, Co-Chairman, DOCOMOMO-UK

Encl.

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