

PRESS STATEMENT

The Board of The Roundhouse has been dismayed by recent malicious gossip about the affairs of The Roundhouse, its finances, its future, and above all, its staff. The Coordinator, Remi Kapo, and lately his assistant, Annabel Waddingham, have been the subjects of much personal vilification and innuendo. Some eighteen months ago, the Board investigated very fully a number of allegations and counter-allegations made by previous employees about the Coordinator and vice versa. It came to the conclusion that "it does not intend to pursue further accusations since it believed the causes to be found in the structure of the project and historical factors and not in the actions or non-actions of individuals". That statement was made in March 1987 and it is shabby journalism to revive old and unsubstantiated allegations. In particular, "sexual harassment" has an ugly ring to it. Since the Board could find no substantiation of any such behaviour, it is disgraceful to repeat the accusation.

Since then, it has been suggested that £100,000 is mysteriously missing from Roundhouse funds. The Roundhouse accounts are audited annually, like those of most other organisations. The latest, for 1987/88, show a total income of just over £130,000 so the idea of three-quarters of that sum being adrift is laughable. Indeed, the Board has no evidence of any money being adrift at all. If it had, an enquiry might well be required. As it is, none is underway and none will be ordered unless evidence is forthcoming to make it necessary. Unsubstantiated reports in newspapers cannot count as evidence.

For example, there have been reports of irregularities in the financial documentation of a recent employee, Joan Braithwaite. The Board is not impressed by articles in the Hampstead and Highgate Express and the Sunday Times by Ian Birrell. It has an ample file of its own on the subject, which leads it to the conclusion that there is no substance in such complaints.

It would be more helpful to the future of The Roundhouse if interested parties would concentrate on the essential problem - how to find enough capital to convert The Roundhouse into an arts centre. That scheme needs about £1.75 million. The Roundhouse has been promised around £1 million from Central and local government. It needs the support of the private sector for the rest. Some assessment of the opportunities and possibilities of that would be more useful than recent sensationalism, and less unfair and distressing to Remi Kapo, who as Coordinator has always promoted the idea of The Roundhouse as a much-needed and long-awaited arts centre for the black community. Reports of Mr Kapo and Miss Waddingham tendering their resignations are both untimely and quite unconnected with the speculation referred to above. The employment policy of The Roundhouse must be dictated solely by the current state of the conversion programme. The Board invites the press to encourage that programme.

22nd September 1988

Sent 26th 1988

Crisis over funding at black arts centre

by Ian Birrell

AN investigation is to be launched this week into allegations of financial malpractice and mismanagement at the Roundhouse, the proposed national black arts centre in north London.

It is to be carried out by the Arts Council and independent accountants, and is expected to report next week. It comes at a time when the future of the project is already in doubt due to funding problems.

The Roundhouse has been plagued by problems since it was set up by the GLC in 1983, with the idea of creating a centre of excellence for black arts to rival any in the world. Known derisively as the Great Black Elephant, it has since spent more than £3m of public money but has not opened.

The original £8.5m scheme, designed by Richard Rogers, architect of the Pompidou Centre in Paris, had to be scrapped with the abolition of the GLC in 1986. A revised £1.8m "minimum option" plan, to turn the former Victorian engine shed into an 800-seat theatre, is still an estimated £900,000 short.

At the centre of the controversy is Remi Kapo, its coordinator and one of the highest-paid arts administrators in London, and Annabel Waddingham, his assistant. Both offered to resign earlier this month.

The investigation follows claims by Joan Braithwaite, a former arts administrator at the centre, who resigned a fortnight ago in fury at the way it was being run.

She alleged that she spent her first two months mainly working for Akintunde Pro-

ductions, a theatre company run by Kapo, instead of on Roundhouse work, and that apart from this there was little to do. This is backed by another former Roundhouse worker who left in June.

Kapo and Waddingham controlled the centre so tightly, said Braithwaite, that when they left the country she and the other worker had three weeks off on full pay.

She also claimed that she was not given her legally-required contract of employment or pay slips for the first three months. She did get pay slips for her last two months' employment but they made no mention of sick pay deductions, although £269.22 was docked from her salary.

She claims she discussed many of her complaints with Jocelyn Barrow, the BBC governor who heads the Roundhouse board of management, in the first week of August.

Other board members, however, say nothing was mentioned at a subsequent meeting, and expressed great concern when presented with Braithwaite's evidence by The Sunday Times last week: "What is being said makes the alarm bells ring loudly," said Robert Hughes, Conservative MP for Harrow West.

He and Sir Alan Green-gross, former Tory leader on the GLC, rang Lord Michael Birkett, board vice-chairman, late on Thursday night to persuade him to order the investigation. Barrow is currently on holiday.

Hughes said the investiga-

tion was to be carried out by the Roundhouse accountants and the Arts Council. The council would only say that discussions were taking place among the funding bodies on the project's future.

This is not the first controversy surrounding Kapo. He was involved in a row last year over the dismissal of four workers from the project, amid accusations of victimisation, sexual harassment and mismanagement.

A leaked Arts Council memo at that time reported Barrow saying that Kapo "panics in a crisis, is a poor delegator and cannot organise his time well".

Frequent calls have also been made for Kapo's resignation, and for an investigation into the Roundhouse, by figures from the black arts world.

Among them is Efua Taylor, Afro-Asian councillor on Equity's ruling body until July: "I have been critical because the black arts community did not know what was going on, and was losing interest because it had no input. It needs commercial backing and firms will not back it now with its track record."

The current crisis contrasts sharply with the optimism expressed in April, when Barrow said contracts were ready to go out to tender and that work should start on site in June.

The funding bodies, which include the Arts Council, Greater London Arts and Camden council, have arranged a meeting for September 26, when they will discuss recommending the end of the project to a board meeting on October 3.



Kapo: one of the highest-paid arts administrators in London