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1/27/9 An Interview with Cr. A. McCutcheon.

Cr. A. McCutcheon, an architect and a Methodist Minister was recently awarded a Churchill Scholarship which enabled him to travel overseas to study Housing and Planning Developments in other countries.

In this interview Cr. McCutcheon discusses high density housing, especially relating his ideas to the Housing Commission of Victoria. For a number of years Cr. McCutcheon has been a tenant of a Housing Commission flat in Collingwood, so his statements are tempered by his own family's daily experiences.

Cr. McCutcheon pointed out that the Housing Commission planners have introduced several innovations which show no consideration of the people who were to occupy the flats they built. Firstly the buildings were put on stilts which create air currents and mean residents have to mount an extra flight of stairs. No storage was provided at ground level so that prams and children's bicycles have to be dragged upstairs or left outside where they can be easily stolen. Laundries were placed on the roof which means children are left unattended whilst their mother goes up to do the washing or they are left on the roof while she goes down for another load.

Supervision of children becomes a problem and can lead to child-parent problems. Although families are given priority, the flats do not allow children to pursue normal activities. Rooms are small and the present corridors are open, narrow and cold and not suitable play areas. Either the parents keep their children inside where they can keep an eye on them or they allow them outside where there is no shelter and where they can't supervise them.

There is a rather unusual fact which illustrates the general problem. In high rise flats there are two lifts; one which stops at every second floor, the other at the alternate ones. This has one advantage in that there are only ten stops instead of the possible twenty, which saves time. However, it segregates people so that those who affect each other (i.e. on the floor above and below) are unlikely to meet. There is no communal sense such as is found in normal streets where neighbours chat over the fence as they watch their children play together. There is none of the social life, the sharing of facilities and feeling of belonging of the street because people don't see each other or live together as a community.

What is needed, says Cr. McCutcheon, is a real understanding of what creates communities and brings people together.

The style of architecture itself can have an adverse psychological effect on the occupants of a building. A feeling of alienation and inferiority can arise because the buildings look so different from those used by the rest of the community and because they appear that not much money has been spent on them. The Housing Commission concentrates on providing shelter for numbers, arguing that they have a long waiting list. They speak in quantitative terms whereas people are more interested

in the quality of their environment. Cr. McCutcheon has found that tenants know what they want in amenities and services, and are willing to express their views. "If the Commissioners had to live in the first flats they built, they would have been the last." He feels that more experiment is needed in such things as medium density clusters of houses, instead of assuming that what we have at present is the only answer.

Such experiments have been tried with success overseas. In England, over the last 10-15 years, playgrounds and other facilities have been integrated into housing projects. Experts have done research into design and layout and this has been applied in landscaping, architecture and exterior decorating. Studies by social research teams have shown that tenants are aware of the exterior and money spent on improving the total environment does make a difference.

At present private enterprise is playing a large part in housing development, building O.Y.O. flats. Because most investors are interested only in profit, it is often a case of squeezing as many people as possible under the regulations onto a given piece of land. They are not interested in the people themselves and whether adequate space, schools and other facilities are available.

Cr. McCutcheon feels that all redevelopment should be programmed. A central control would be able to deal with some problems in advance. For example, in Collingwood last year two blocks of flats opened and soon another 1050 new residents, approximately half of whom are children will move into the area, and yet no real action has been taken by the Education Department to ensure that schooling facilities will be available. The Government seems to have a "don't care" attitude to the people in these areas and the problems they face.

A redevelopment authority is needed to control urban development. Not only town planners and architects, but social workers and psychologists should be included in a team to study future trends. Cr. McCutcheon feels that a social profile should be taken of an area before bulldozers move in. "We are often asked to preserve particular buildings, but what about a community a whole pattern of living?" Redevelopment authorities should study what's there in the first place and aim at preserving the community and its structure, discussing the project with the people so that they participate in the planning of their area. You need qualified people to present alternatives to existing groups such as tenants and shopkeepers and to find out what they want, not what a few men think they want. Developers would need to work in co-operation with transport and education authorities to ensure that the real needs of the people are met.

At the moment, little research is being done in Australia. We need imagination in planning, experimentation and a real awareness of the individual in relation to his total environment.

The Collingwood North Richmond Parish Council has attempted to show an alternative to present flats in Clifton Hill, where eleven terrace houses, each with a large living area and a terrace courtyard, have been built. These O.Y.O. units compare in cost to existing terrace houses in the area.

In Britain, a new town programme has been put into operation. It involves firstly making a green belt around London (remember ours?) so that the city can't spread any further. Whole new towns are established and populations taken from the city to these outer areas which are linked by a modern transport system, so that it is possible to work in one town and live in another. This form of decentralization has now been tried throughout Britain.

By the year 2000 the population of Melbourne will have reached 5 million. In the future, growth may be controlled (e.g. the development of the Latrobe Valley toward Dandenong) with the establishment of metro towns of approximately 100,000 people. As one town fills up another, planned for this size population, is built and so on. Satellite towns would also ease the pressure on already densely populated city areas. The extent to which such schemes are implemented depends on the public and

vested interests in land which may determine what areas are used and preserved. Public transport and roadways would have to be vastly improved upon to meet future needs. However, all this needs to be planned for now.

2/27/9 High Density with Privacy

A Revolution
Or only a Fashion ?

(By "Alpha")

Established circles, starting with enlightened professionals are progressively advancing a new concept of higher-density living combined with in-door privacy-plus-community. The concept is crystallising around a cluster-group of one-storey and/or two-storey houses with private walled courtyard-gardens but common car-port, utility yards and common landscaped grounds.

For Melbourne, historically, this constitutes a sort of cross between a flat-on-every-block like parts of St.Kilda, which gives no outdoor privacy whatsoever, (except balconies) and no outdoor community (except car-ports) on the one hand and on the otherhand the familiar detached suburban house with poor outdoor privacy and no community at all. The cross between the ~~two~~ is certainly a long-needed welcome relief combining, at its best genuine indoor-outdoor privacy and sensible community amenities.

The writer is all for it. Of course, the Uniform Building Regulation are the big stumbling block. Straws in the wind for those who want to be "with-it" for example:-

1. "Privacy and Community" (by Chermayeff and Alexander) "Anchor Book" Price
2. The M.M.B.W. Residential Planning Standards (May 1969 but do they go far enough?)
3. The idea of higher density adjacent to "green-wedges" in order to give bigger returns to developers who can then be taxed to compensate owners in the green-wedge (a trend which emerged from speakers at the recent Town & Country Planning Association Seminar "Conservation or Development - Who said We Can't Have Both? - but should not the whole community pay too?)
4. Hamer's speech to the Building Industry Congress (see Irregular No;23, 9/23/9)
5. Jane Cove Epping Road Sydney - 30 homes, each with its identity centred around a private swimming pool and garden area, with landscaped courtyards (called "Karingal" not the same as Jennings's Karingal near Frankston.) (Australian 1/11/1969).
6. Jennings Town Houses on Toorak Farm - 4½ acres near Yarra and Heyington \$2 million prestige two-storey town houses and single-storey courtyard houses sold on Strata Titles a high-class home between \$25,000 and \$65,000 each without the burden of a large garden (called "Clovelly") (The Age 15/5/1969).
7. The State Electricity Commission's housing competition,

This last was reviewed by Graham Whitford, Director of Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Housing Service "Age" 27/10/1969) who commendably, introduces the issue to a wider public.

Purpose of the competition was to stimulate public interest in more intelligent use of land for domestic development and the creation of a suitable environment for people.

The nine points on which the competition was assessed were:

1. Some communal play space for the group families.
2. Individual private courtyards for services and outdoor living.
3. Orientation to capture sun and give privacy.
4. Satisfactory planning for each unit for family living.

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5. Private entry to individual units.
6. Off street car parking with access to each unit.
7. Separate vehicular and pedestrian entry.
8. Economic viability and simplicity of constructions.
9. Observation of building regulations and compliance with competition conditions.

As Whitford explains, the Uniform Building Regulations and Municipal Bylaws have been framed in the past to cater for individual blocks of land. Such regulations are unsuitable for controlling flat development, as can be seen in so many streets, and they certainly do not cope with the types of development seen in the competition.

Some Councils are tackling this problem at the moment and one of them, Brighton has already produced a new system of establishing how far buildings may be erected from boundaries.

Such a new approach will result in a more logical and efficient use of land than present regulations allow.

Modern public transport facilities which are made the focal point of a rich range of local and district social facilities and activities, The cluster-courtyard trend could be a significant move for Melbourne from the status of an over-grown town towards the distinction of a civilised city.

Now this whole trend could turn into either a pleasant palace revolt or a thoroughgoing radical change for Melbourne depending on other planning social and political factors.

Set within a freeway framework the freeway planners will force the zoning planners to ~~construct the~~ average suburban density to something not significantly greater than it is now (6000 per square mile is a typical figure mentioned), so that, to the extent that it develops, this cluster-courtyard concept will improve the amenity but will not have much impact for the better on the social life of community. A few near neighbours will be much nearer. The rest much further, the car just as indispensable, the density still far too low to make any significant contribution to invigorating community activities.

Set within a strong public transport system, used in combination with high-rise for those who want them, ~~deliberately sited on~~ the higher densities, ~~deliberately sited on~~ modern public transport facilities--etc

3/27/9 A Place for a Children's Outing (By "Gamma")

Behind the Exhibition buildings under the spreading elms and planes of the Carlton Gardens there are two new playgrounds.

A miniature road network with traffic signs, intersections, pedestrian crossings, one-way roads, level crossings, flashing lights, and numerous road signs. Here rules must predominate if the facilities are to be used effectively.

Closeby is an Adventure playground where grassy hills, wooden bridges, log fences, stumps and sand have been arranged so that youngsters can make up their own games and find their own adventure from climbing and running, jumping and swimming slipping and sliding, rolling and hiding.

The two new playgrounds were opened by the Minister for Local Government (The Hon. R.H. Hamer) on Friday October 10th.

Both playgrounds indicate that thought is being given to finding ways of providing for children's play other than through the erection of mass produced swings, slides and climbing frames. A short step has been taken to a more realistic attitude to children's needs, but the playgrounds consists entirely of equipment fixed firmly and neatly into the ground, there is no provision for children to create their own adventurous environment through building. It is unfortunate that playgrounds staff is not on duty over the weekends when there is so much need for supervision.

The new playgrounds have been hailed as representing co-operative planning between the people and the Council. It is true that the Council the Playgrounds Association and the Lions Club (who donated some of the cost of equipping the Traffic Playground) worked as a team, but local organisations and parents were not consulted about their ideas for the recreation development.

4/27/9 Subsidies to Private Developers.

Some facts and figures given by Mr. Olive Holding M.L.A. to the Legislative Assembly on 29th October, showed that "The Housing Commission has subsidised A.V. Jennings in a way it would never dream of subsidising private home owners" (Mr. Holding's words) Here are the facts. The Commission subsidised the price of land in Hanover Street Fitzroy to the extent of \$163,000, Harris Street North Melbourne \$312,000, O'Shanassy Street, North Melbourne \$69,000, De Murska Street, Windsor \$140,000, Lee Street Carlton \$231,000, Wood Street North Melbourne \$300,000 and Cross Street, Carlton \$301,000. Not all, but most of these areas have been developed by A.V. Jennings.

By the way if it is right to subsidise housing why is it wrong to subsidise transport?

5/27/9

W.A.M

"Lana was a sad, housebound mother: Then suddenly--W.A.M ! Working Association of Mothers came on the scene".

This is the front cover advertisement for an article entitled "W.A.M Mothers on the Move". The article is printed in the British magazine called "What ?" This publication describes itself as "Ideas for Action"

Mrs Diana Priestly has been the moving spirit behind a new organisation of which she writes: "For a long time I have wanted to begin a cooperative aimed at relieving many mothers and small children, who long for a few hours work a week, of all the practical problems they face ---They cannot go to bed when they are ill---They often never have a chance to make up for lost sleep---They cannot get away from very small children for long enough to restore their reserves of energy and sense of proportion---They cannot look for work without being certain of home relief or vice versa."

So Mrs Priestly called a meeting---and 90 mothers have formed a co-operative---Teachers, nurses, laboratory technicians, social workers, accountants and an art historian are among the pioneer members. They have established a pre-school play group, running morning and afternoon sessions slightly longer than usual, to cater for mothers working part-time. Other members are writing to employers.

The objects of the cooperative are listed as: an employment agency for part-time or home work; play groups; babysitting; relief during illness; bulk purchasing of consumer goods and social contact resulting from these activities rather than in a more contrived way."

In Melbourne, the University Family Club has been functioning on very similar lines. Such experiments stir the hopes of housebound women everywhere; W.A.M is described as a "co-operative by mothers for mothers, designed to provide work for them and care for their children"

Another Idea from W.A.M--How to Control Holiday Traffic

"If half the car owners of a town were stopped from using their cars at weekends, the other half could have far more carefree motoring. This could be made possible by issuing with the road tax a blue or a red disc which could be affixed to the windscreen"

"My idea would be to turn the coastal strip into a toll road network controlled by electronic gates. Residents of the area would get a "key" free, holiday makers would be able to hire a key by the day, the week or the month. A central computer would control the number of cars that had entered a holiday area on any one day, and when it reached an inconvenient size would switch off the gates to the holiday makers but not to the residents." (Our query: Suppose you have a red disc and your mother-in-law a blue one: what then ?)