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This Issue:Stop Press : F.I--What next? (p.3)

The three articles in this issue are extracts from publications All deal mainly with sociological and environment al problems (One is by an Architect, one by a sociologists, one by an engineer and the fourth one by a biologist.)

1. Trend is Not Destiny
2. Environmental Crisis and the Engineer
3. Biological-Social Problems in the Expanding Community.

Trend is not Destiny: Alternatives to Trend.

1.43.71

by Albert Mayer...Architect.

Planner of Environment, American Institute of Architects. This is an addendum to Mayer's book "The Urgent Future" published in 1967 by McGraw Book Co.

Another troubling factor is that the whole tendency of urban and highway planning and development in this country is to follow trend, to study trend, to ride with trend as smoothly as possible. But trend can be desperately undesirable, however carefully we adjust to it. There is almost no creative recognition that we could be and must be in creative control, that trend is not destiny.

Imagination and statesmanship can take trend into account and in their stride, can distinguish between the inevitable and the alterable and controllable, can bend trend to human and moral purpose. In contrast to irresistible trend, there is a greater than ever wealth of opportunity and choice. But we have to muster the imaginative self-discipline not to get lost among the riches.

The rage for statistics is one index of the enthronement of trend. Yet statistics can often be nothing but a record of reaction and adjustment to unsatisfactory conditions; and they can be accurate but in a high degree misleading. "Megalopolis" and similar coined expressions give some sort of sloganistic comforting sanction to an ultimate compounding of undesirable conditions. "Megalopolis" describes a manifest troubling trend: the oozing together of already amorphous cities into a sort of flow hundreds of miles in dimension, from Boston to Washington, from Milwaukee to Chicago, from Pittsburgh to Cleveland. By taking up the expression as the dernier cri, the "sophisticated" help themselves accept condition.

Megalopolis is the apotheosis of trend. It is also stupid and inhumane, Also, it can be resisted, out-witted, re-formed. When their ring of cities known as the Randstad-Amsterdam, Hearlem, The Hague, Rotterdam, and Utrecht- was far along toward Megalopolis, the Dutch decided it was an evil to be countered, that trend could be dethroned. They are diverting much of the urban spread into quite different sections of the country. They have kept green space between cities and green space and farming at the centre of the Randstad. In England the overpill of cities is being dealt with by organic New Towns. After the authorization and development of fifteen, there was a lull, and then six more. A new series and variations are under way. At this writing, there are a total of twenty-eight New Towns. There are other solutions and other possibilities as well, which I will develop; but also, our existing cities that are already so glutinous and anonymous can be reshaped, after some thinning out, into organic summations of civilizations.

Many of the things we do accentuate trend. As a quick example:

The sacred cow of highway planners is the cost-benefit ratio. This buys public and business approbation. What does it mean? It means that we plan our throughways and interstate highway system where there is the greatest congestion, where the immediate return is greatest, where the new or expanded facility can make it easier for still more cars and trucks. More revenue, aggravated congestion- and then, another round of such sharper. Note that on the radio news we now can ascertain the most advantageous (old) bypasses, to avoid the over-crowded new superhighways.

Will refer to one major superhighway, completed a few years ago, as the largest parking lot in the world.

Originally, in our early history, nation policy pushed railroads into new areas to create new opportunity and meet new challenge. What has happened at this viewpoint? Now we give trend a big nudge forward, make it more irreversible and harder to manage. Let us, rather, give the cost-benefit ratio a future dimension. Let us take off the statistical man's strait-jacket and take a man-from-Mars look at things. Then, let us move, not in circles around the same spots, but in new directions. Let us open up new opportunities in new areas. Again: the planning of the early cross country railroads had a wonderful adventurous time- and -space dimension which over time has paid off far, far more handsomely in our American adventure than any cost-benefit ratio that would have been narrowly demonstrable.

The Concept of Total Equations.

A major concept I want to inject here is that of "total equations". In our current dominant thinking and action, many proposals are justified by apparent return on investment. Many are rejected or not made because of apparent lack of financial return, consequent need of government subsidy, etc. But the fact is that this thinking-action process is based on often narrow partial equations, like any individual commercial operation. The broader public factors of cost and return fail to be considered. For instance, the New York Port Authority is about to build a gigantic World Trade Center in lower Manhattan in New York City. Of office space alone there will be 10 million square feet, plus much exhibition space and incomparable concentration of all kinds of facilities. A fine case is made and there is a good financial return available. But what of the total equation, and what about alternatives and their equations? What will be the money cost of added transportation facilities and operations and the cost, in wear and tear and tensions, of jamming new thousands of people into the already over-crowded tip of Manhattan- already filled with Stock Exchange and Wall Street workers, bank and insurance-company headquarters and brokers, produce exchanges, major law offices? Let us have total equations, please; and equally, tell us the characteristics of alternatives.

The cost-benefit ratio planning of the highway man and the "highest and best use" of the real-estate man both thrive on congestion, in the former case increasing it by providing ingenious temporary relief. The new highway is quickly and more massively overfilled, and in turn more local streets and more garage terminals are built. And then, another round- and we happily, laxly assume that the next 100 billion spent will solve what the last 100 billion only made worse. After the beautiful Verrazano V-L bridge in New York City was opened, headlines announced that from the very first, the number of users exceeded by 30 per cent the number anticipated. While this is good news for bondholders, it is another case of new facilities spirally encouraging more traffic. The lesson of flood control has not been learned; control the headwaters and minimize flow, instead of repeating efforts at ever higher costs to handle ever-increasing floods at the mouth of the river.

Consider a prime example of the real estate man's "highest and best use" and the need for total equations to control private decisions in key situations: the 70 storey Pan American Building just north of Grand Central Station in New York. The private investors have or will have an excellent return. The city will collect a big chunk of taxes. But what else is there to say, in the spirit of total equations? To one of the most congested spots in the world have been added daily large numbers of trucks to supply building and tenants and daily thousands of workers to jam the sidewalks, to invade the already jammed stand-up and sit-down lunch facilities, to squeeze into the tight subway space. Suppose, to consider a hypothetical alternative, the site had been turned into a little green low-pressure breathing area in the midst of super-tensions. We don't lose the big chunk of taxes, because there is, for example, a notable site for an equal building at the southern end of Madison Avenue at 23rd Street. A Skyscraper there would strongly draw the eye; the Pan Am roof sign would be just as prominent. The surrounding area is busy but only mildly congested, and includes a small park. The location is more convenient to both Penn Station and Grand Central than either one is to the other and well placed among other office and shipping concentrations; the Pan Am ticket office could remain at the very heart of things.

On quite a different plane of total equations and of alternatives, several eminent economists have concluded that investment in education produces as high a return as investment in almost any other field and a much higher return than in most. Theodore W. Schultz notes that "the 1958 data appear to support the following rates of return: elementary, 35%; high school, 10%; and to college, 11%". He also quotes some higher estimates. These are hard-boiled figures, taking into account capital investment, earnings foregone during the period of education, and, as return, changes in lifetime earnings. Consideration of such items as additional benefit to family is not included.

This book does not primarily deal with either economics or education. But it is deeply concerned to unfreeze our thinking and broaden our equations to effectively include a larger range of factors and a longer range in time, so that we can permit ourselves to create a new human environment. Consider expenditure on social operations, a very vast increase in which, on the private-equations basis, simply raises budgets, can't be considered because it can't be afforded etc. In more far-reaching equations - in terms of massively creating rewarding employment and employables, better performance, and savings on remedial institutions - the costs look very different. Altogether, we must radically expand our conception of what is productive work and get out of the habit of thinking that only production of material goods is wealth-creating.

F.I. ---What Next ?

So the Government has rejected F.I (the eastern leg of the "inner ring" freeway) ?

This, so it appears from the press reports, was a "win" for the attitude of the M.C.P.B, the C.R.B, the T.C.P.A and the C.U.A (Committee for Urban Action). It represents a "win" for the policy of more emphasis on public transport for CBD commuting as against both the MMBW and the MTC

It would be a mistake to overemphasise the significance of the event. As "Irregular No 42" described the TCPA policy: "it is a tame transport reform"---"sensible enough, but not really very radical" (2/42/71). After all, the victory is a victory only in the framework of a tamish reform.

Regarded, however, as a straw in the wind---as a first step in the right direction instead of many steps in the wrong direction, the decision could prove to be valuable.

Whether the move will amount to a step in the right direction will require sustained pressure; the force of habit of the commuting motorist is a terrible force to contend with, not to be overcome with the first timid one-sided blow !

The daily press, for example "played" the significance of the event as (1) more money for new trains (2) for new trams and (3) for "the loop". If this is all the decision means it would be a hollow victory because all three measures are already part of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, so it would imply only a shift in priority of public transport over freeways within the framework of the Plan. However, if the TCPA proposal for suburban parking complexes is adopted, deletion of F.I could be a permanent matter rather than a postponed one.

Even more childish than the daily press however is the MMBW report in its News Letter of 16th. September just before the Government's decision

It hits at "straw man" of its own creation, trying to make out that those who advocate fixed rail systems have ignored the non-peak "day-to-day movement of goods and people". It speaks as if the only objection to the eastern leg of the ring road was the destruction of 116 trees. It raises the bogey of massive disruption and redevelopment made necessary by a bigger F2, if F1 is rejected (as if F2, as originally conceived, would not have been disruptive at all !!). Alternatives, such as encouraging car commuters to suburban stations to lessen the need for freeways are studiously avoided. It is a sad commentary that the MMBW which was given responsibility for highways because it was a planning authority, has apparently abdicated to its highway engineers on all transport problems. The MMBW planners would surely warn of the impact of on the whole city !!

Environmental Crisis and the Engineer

by David Beauchamp.

(Member of the Institute of Engineers one of the Founders of the Carlton Association) Article in Chartered Engineer, August, 1971.

..... What should the engineering profession be doing to re-establish its position in the community and to provide leadership in the environmental crisis. There are at least three ways in which engineers can exert influence.

The first is to adopt the policy formulated by the International Federation of Consulting Engineers who stated that "a consulting engineer has a duty to draw his client's attention to any potential pollution which may be inherent in his proposals".

Indeed it would be better if the consultant was to point out any obvious pollution problems before accepting a brief. The first clause of the Institution's Code of Ethics is a more general statement of this proposition. The clause reads "An engineer's responsibility to the community shall at all times come before his responsibility to the Profession, to sectional or private interests, or to other Engineers.".....

The second is to provide technical skills and information to various community groups which are concerned with environmental problems. A number of engineers are already doing this through such organisations as the Town and Country Planning Association, the Committee for Urban Action, and the Yarra Valley Preservation League.

Mr. Beauchamp then gives several detailed examples, stating that five engineers were on the T.C.P.A. Transport Committee, giving a summary of that report, also detailing some of the actions by the Committee for Urban Action, especially on urban renewal problems.)

The third way of re-establishing the profession's status in the community is for The Institution of Engineers to make public statements on environmental issues. This could be done by setting up ad-hoc committees to report on various issues as they arise.

The Institution's attitude to date is probably exemplified by the seminar it ran on the Transportation Plan. The majority of papers presented dealt with the technical aspects of the plan. No comment was made on what the likely effect would be on the communities bisected by the proposed freeways, no figures given on how much public park land and private houses would have to be resumed to build the freeway network, no alternatives such as dial-a-bus, were discussed.

In contrast to this is the Institute of Architects recent public statements on Housing Commission activity in Brooks Crescent, Fitzroy, and the Urban Renewal Bill.....

If the engineering profession and The Institution continue to largely ignore environmental issues then they will be failing to line up with the first requirements of the Code of Ethics and will become in the public eye nothing more than technocrats who design projects which worsen the state of the environment.

C.U.A "Parking Blight" Report

The latest report of the Committee for Urban Action is on "Parking Blight in the Inner Areas". This is the report which, submitted to the Minister for Local Government in September, helped, (along with the reports of the TCPB, the CRB and the TCPA) to change the Government's decision on P.I (See p.3 above)

It is expected that it will shortly be available in a printed form and will include the first C.U.A report on the subject of transport in the inner areas presented to the Minister in November 1970 and will sell for \$1. Enquiries should be directed to Mr G. Baker, Secretary of the Committee for Urban Action, P.O Box 102, North Melbourne 3051.

Planning Riddle : What is a "region" ?

Answer : the next biggest administrative unit than the one which has just been tried and failed : The moral ? Sociological problems cannot be solved by administrative measures alone.

Biological and Social Problems in the Expanding Community; Trends and Perspectives

3.43.71

by Dr. S.V. Boynton F.A.A.

Head of the John Curtin School of Medical Research, A.N.U. Canberra.
(This extract is from an address by Dr. Boynton to the Institute of Municipal Administrators at their first National Symposium held in Canberra, May 1970.)

Thus, to surrender to the inevitability of industrial, population and city growth, is tantamount to admitting that we human beings have not only lost control, but have no chance of regaining it; it amounts to the passive acceptance, through our own activities, of the final destruction of the biosphere. If we throw up our arms in despair, resolving simply to make the best of a bad situation, then it would seem that our civilisation is doomed to an early extinction, and we shall be depriving countless potential generations of the opportunity to live and to experience joy.

I think that the most important contribution that biology can make to the human predicament lies in this simple straightforward lesson that it tells us, namely, that continued growth of population and industry, even given all the piece-meal anti-pollution measures in the world, will in the end lead to eco-catastrophe. We must gain control of our own cultural processes, or else we perish.

I am personally convinced that nothing short of a great wave of new thinking spreading rapidly through all sections of the community can possibly hope to save us from eco-catastrophe. This wave of new thinking, if it comes about in time and is to be effective, must, I believe, have the following characteristics:-

(1) It must be characterised by renewed interest in the quality of life and a lessening of concern for quantity per se. It must involve a total rejection of the gospel of perpetual growth and technological advance, and also a complete re-appraisal of the current concept of "progress".

(2) We must turn our minds to the question of what kind of world (and, more locally, what kind of Australia and even more locally, what kind of municipality we really want for the future.) In other words, the new thinking must involve a total rejection of the "inevitability" attitude and a total rejection of the passive acceptance of our role as victims of the techno-demographic, economic and military spirals. In Australia as a whole, for example, among other things we must ask - Is continual growth of population, of industry and of cities really, taking the long view, the best, the wisest national policy?

(3) Society must embrace again the ancient form of wisdom that still persists among some so-called "primitive" peoples of the world, namely, a profound respect for the processes of nature on which life depends and a sound appreciation of the fact that human welfare, on the level of the individual and of society, requires that we live in harmony with nature. In other words, we must cease posing as self-styled "conquerors" of nature - conquerors, that is, of that set of processes which not only gave us life in the first place, but on which our civilisation always has, and always will depend for its existence.

(4) Perhaps most important of all, this new thinking or new morality must involve a genuine and heartfelt concern both for the survival of that unique product of the long evolutionary process, Homo Sapiens, and also for the quality of the lives of our potential descendents.

I will not take up your time by discussing the various steps that I personally happen to think we should take. Nevertheless, I would like to emphasise that every thinking man and woman in the community has a responsibility in these matters, and it is absolutely no use naively imagining that these serious problems can be left safely in the hands of scientists, governments, or indeed any other single group within the community. However, it is also clear that certain key groups in society have special responsibilities and we must count among these key groups those people responsible for municipal administration.
