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AN IRREGULAR PUBLICATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE TOWN PLANNING RESEARCH GROUP (NOT FOR GENERAL PUBLICATION OR DUPLICATION.)

OUR BIRTHDAY

'Irregular', believe it or not, is one year old. To prove that we have come 'of age' in more ways than mere effluxion of time, this issue is the third consecutive number contributed entirely by our readers.

Irregular No. 8 (7/8/8 to 18/8/8) analysed some of Jane Jacobs' ideas on desirable housing densities and discussed applicability to Australian conditions.

In this issue another reader lays emphasis on another aspect of Jane 'Jacobism'. The possibility of the 'unslumming' of slums, and asks whether this is not applicable here.

We open "Irregular" to further contributions on Jane Jacobs.

JACOBISM

(by Jonathon)

1/11/8

When I was asked to write an article, a piece for this journal, I agreed to do so with some trepidation. I belong to the "I know what I like" school, not much lauded these days by any of the more intellectual art critics! In other words, in the sphere of Town Planning I am easily an unsophisticated innocent.

But, for the most part I do know that I like the ideas of Jane Jacobs, from Greenwich Village; though, I do not think she attributes too much importance or respect to Town Planning as we popularly know it. Nonetheless she has brought to this rather exalted profession a strong and healthy incitement for better performance.

Above all I see Jane Jacobs as an iconoclast. Obviously an uninhibited person. She attacks with force, wit and logic the hallowed names of Howard, Le Corbusier, Mumford and Bauer. These four "greats" of the Town Planning world .. I quote .. "Utopian Minders of Other people's leisure". Some, no doubt, will disagree with these caustic words, but I feel she is more than half on the ball.

Indeed, as "DELTA" has said in his recent very fine article for this journal, .. "Can we as architects meet Society's demand? .. it is left to the muttering of the multitude to make the best of the absurdities which are then handed to them".

2/11/8

Jane Jacobs possesses a warm sympathy for the people of the world, and she points out, with telling logic that the city without people, is a city deprived. Parks and playgrounds unpeopled are deprived parks and playgrounds. It follows then, that the architects and planners are to a degree to be the highly qualified servants of the mass population. More simply phrased, they are to be democratic.

3/11/8

In her lively book, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" Jane Jacobs takes as her example par excellence the rather seedy district of North End Boston, U.S.A. and shows how a so called slum area can be rehabilitated. Twenty years ago most of its buildings were old and dilapidated, there were few parks. Housing was mainly flats and five storey tenements. The people were mostly desperately poor. Twenty years later Jane Jacobs visited this area again and she was amazed at the manner in which many of the previously run-down buildings had been rehabilitated. Dispersed among the residential buildings were many fine food stores, and the streets were alive with adults and children. Busy cheerful streets, wonderfully safe for all to be upon. How did this transformation come about? From what source was finance found for this surprising renaissance? Certainly not from the American banking system, which had in the past, always refused the necessary loans and mortgages for such renewal. It was financed by the people themselves, from business and housing earnings. Much of the renovation required was carried out by skilled artisans living in the neighbourhood, by means of a roster system with other residents and relatives.

4/11/8

I do not know whether these achievements at the North End are opposite to the reclamation schemes of inner Melbourne, but at least it must be worthy of consideration, after making allowances for differences of environment and circumstances. Perhaps something like this might be organised along side the activity of the Housing Commission.

5/11/8

Until I read, with growing pleasure and awareness, this amazing book by an amazing woman, I had little idea of the important part played by the pavement life of a great city. The security and safety that the sidewalks provide seem to act as a safety valve for the citizens of the particular city. Jane Jacob deals at great length with her pavement thomes, and perhaps some one can tell me how our Melbourne footpaths compare with those she writes about.

This is a book for any one interested and concerned with the future of our cities in Australia and most of all for the progressive, alive idea of its author.

1848 and ALL THAT

(Book Review by "Gamma")

6/11/8

"The origins of Town Planning" by Leonardo Benevolo has recently been translated from the Italian. It is published by Routledge and Kegan Paul. As it costs \$5.30 it is fortunate that it is on the shelves of some municipal libraries.

This study of nineteenth century experimental town planning explains that the attempts to right the evils of industrial towns found expression in two schools of thought. One held that new planning must start from scratch, the utopians and the opposite one held that the defects should be remedied separately ... the piece-meal planners. Leonardo gives a detailed and documented account of the development of town planning in these separate directions.

7/11/8 Utopian Colonies

Owen, St. Simon, Fourier Cabet and Godin did not merely write about ideal cities, but agitated for their realisation. In this book we can read extracts from Fourier's "La Democratique Pacifique", where he describes the building standards, the garden landscaping, the nursery, the school, the community halls, the separation of factories from dwellings, the integration of the country with the town and many other details of his ideal community. There is also a detailed description of Godin's "Familistere" and blue prints of the buildings and of the town of Godins' community at Guise.

Leonardo Benevolo discusses the success and failure of the many utopian settlements in France, England and Particularly in America. It is of interest to note that the only one of these schemes which lasted for any length of time was Godin's village at Guise in France. It was established in 1859 and was still in existence in 1939. In contrast to the other ideal colonies, which relied mainly on agricultural pursuits, Guise had a co-operatively owned iron foundry and the profits from this industry built an economic base for the town.

8/11/8 Paternalistic Piece Meal Planners.

Lord Shaftesbury and Lord Morpeth established the General Board of Health in England in the mid nineteenth century; while at about the same time, Count Armand de Melun introduced plans for slum abolition and town planning in France. Benevolo regards such groups of officials, and specialists as laying the real foundations of modern town planning legislation. They had the technical and legislative means to implement these schemes. This political advantage gave piece-meal planners predominance.

9/11/8 Common Ideology of Both Groups

Benevolo claims that in the earliest beginnings both these schools of town planners were influenced by socialist ideology of socialism rather than in technical studies.

10/11/8 1848 Turning Point.

The failure of the 1848 revolutions and the advent of Marx and Engels marked a turning point in town planning according to Benevolo. On the one hand the official town planners cut adrift from political discussion and tended to become increasingly purely technical and concerned with maintaining the interests of the established powers. Specialist research and experiment were disparaged and partial reforms were only allowed if they were within the sphere of conservative ideology.

On the other hand, the growth of political consciousness in the workingclass led to the exposure of the unrealistic idealism of earlier town planning. As the socialists were cut off from the main stream of town planning; some, (the utopian socialists) retreated to remote corners of the world where they set up their idyllic colonies; but the majority (the scientific socialists) regarded the future organisation of towns as dependent on a general economic revolution.

11/11/8 Benevolo's Main Thesis

Benevolo thinks that it is now increasingly being theoretically recognised that for the past one hundred years the piece meal planning has been uncommitted to any overall social and moral ideal and dependent on the favours of the establishment. He explains that the relevance of this recognition is in the progressive tendencies of modern town planning to increasingly try to make contact once more with the social forces which tend towards a general transformation of society.

12/11/8 Exciting .. Disappointing .. Inspiring

"The Origin of Town Planning" is a refreshing book. Its broad historical analysis stretches through a number of countries. The years of the past century are bridged by the use of extensive quotes from original documents by Fourier, Engels, Disraeli, Huxman and many others.

But "The Origin of Modern Town Planning" is a disappointing book. It is such a near miss. It is almost a scientific political study of town planning. In emphasising the politics of the period and almost ignoring the economic restrictions of the mid-nineteenth century, Benevolo has over-simplified the reason for the schism between the socialists (both utopian and scientific) and the piece-meal town planners (both paternalistic and reformist.)

Nevertheless, the main message of "The Origin of Town Planning" is an inspiration to all town planners to establish a new relationship between politics and town planning.

It is to be hoped that a writer such as Benevolo continues his contribution to the study of town planning. In his book he has given a glimpse of how town-planning will cease to be a frustrating abstraction when politics and human aspiration are geared in with the campaign for social change.

13/11/8

Comment on Irregular No. 8 on redevelopment

In Australian conditions, in my opinion, full account should be taken of the climate which is somewhat hotter than the European - although I doubt if this makes much difference to Melbourne! and there is much to be said for detached houses, or at any rate full provision of space, air, air-conditioning etc. for any high rise flats. (From South Australia.)

14/11/8

Corrections

Irregular 13/10/8 "Urban space ... produces well over 4% of total economic output." Isn't this a misprinted figure?

True "well over " but I think a heck of a lot over?!

The Herald publication Growth of Melbourne Market December, 1967 shows that "Melbourne as a percentage of Victorian produces 81% value of production and 79.4% of value of output," and if "urban" means cities and not just capitals then a similar figure must apply to N.S.W. and possibly to South Australia, which makes it difficult for an Australian average to get anywhere near 4%. (from Willis.)

(Comment: Thanks Willis. It was a misprint and should have been 80%.

Lowdon Wingo was referring to America not Australia although the text does not make this clear.

Another boo-boo the eagle eye overlooked: The annual world urban population increase is 4% but the annual general (i.e. urban plus rural) population increase is 2%, not 20% as shown in 6/10/8.)

Ref: "Urban Spaces in a Policy Perspective"

Lowdon Wingo in a Book titled Cities and Space
The Future of Urban Land (1963)
The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore.