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This issue: A REDEVELOPMENT ISSUE :

1. What Sort of "Redevelopment Authority"?
2. Redevelopment---for What ?
3. Wise words of another Cabinet Minister

1. What Sort of "Redevelopment Authority"?

The Government is preparing legislation for a "redevelopment authority" for the spring session of Parliament.

1/23/9

Alternatives

Such a redevelopment authority could conceivably be:-

1. An enlarged Melbourne City Council.
2. A special branch of the Melb.& Metro.Board of Works.
3. The Housing Commission (as it is now)
4. A separate division of the Housing Committee (as suggested by the Town & Country Planning Association)
5. An entirely new independent body set up for the purpose.

There is a terrible fear growing that the Housing Commission (as is) will be equipped with still greater powers and given the responsibility.

The fear springs from an accumulating avalanche of informed opinion that the Commission has not proved itself to be even remotely competent for such a task.

The Commission justifies all weaknesses on its lack of funds. This is a major weakness, no doubt. But there is a complex of other weaknesses which have little or no bearing on finances.

2/23/9

Insensitive

The Commission lacks sociological understanding, caring nought for any concept of retaining the community fabric, as it goes on, nor for incorporating properly-staffed community facilities on its estates, nor even for making any scientific surveys to determine the effect of its operations on people's ~~in~~ lives to improve matters for the future. It lacks planning understanding, keeping its plans secret, and "picking off" protestors one by one instead of trying to ~~at~~ go about things in such a way as to enlist community support. It lacks aesthetic calibre, insisting, for example, on putting all buildings on stilts tending to create on some estates great bleak unprotected windswept unusable spaces beneath and around. It fails to co-ordinate with other authorities even trying to ~~have~~ obtain municipal Council funds which the Councils will soon sorely need to expand libraries, kindergartens, sporting facilities, halls, health centres and all other services necessary to cope with the newer densities. Its technique of putting "orders" on areas for long periods tends to depress land values so the Commission can eventually buy cheaper, to the accompanying great distress of those on pensions and lower incomes; but then it sells half of this land to big private developers. And finally it seems quite unconcerned about the evident growing desire to preserve choice areas of inner Melbourne where the environmental character of our great grandfathers can be appropriately retained.

"Fear", therefore, is the right word, because the Government has permitted the Commission to develop policies which can only be summed up as insensitive. Worst feature of all its many forms of insensitivity is the universal feeling that nothing that any group in the community can do can have the slightest effect.

So, an anti-Commission front has emerged ranging from pensioners, students and Commission tenants to aesthetes, preservationists, segments of the fashionable wealthy, lovers of lace balconies and the National Trust, not to mention haters-of-high-density.

Yet despite all, the Commission---such is the irony of history---had its origin in the near-missionary type anti-slum zeal and idealistic and sincere townplanning aspirations of Oswald Barnett, and with the momentum of its origins has indeed gradually improved the quality of the inside of the dwelling units, has not indulged in "overlooking" and overcrowding of buildings on the site, as has private enterprise, and constitutes an absolutely essential function to produce still low-cost housing for the thousands desperately in need of it.

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Two Dangers

Just so: there are two dangers to fear, not one.

The first danger is that the Housing Commission as it stands will be given overriding "development" powers which could create an authoritarian juggernaut rolling roughshod over every sensible and sensitive human value.

The second danger is the opposite one that the Government policy, as thus far expressed by the Commission, could create such a furor of indignant opposition that the very policy of Government provision of popular low-cost low-rent housing could be endangered.

To meet this situation without becoming entangled in the inevitable and often unprincipled departmental and/or political-party jealousies and manoeuvring for power; positions as between the various alternative proposals (i.e. M.C.C., the M.M.B.W., the Housing Commission etc), it would seem that pressure of all men of goodwill should be directed to certain principles, no matter what machinery is devised.

4/23/9

A Principled Approach

We advance the following:-

- (a) Directorship Initiative and implementation of re-development planning to be vested in a team of top-quality experts---say a townplanner, a sociologist, an architect, a landscape architect who on planning aspects give the necessary framework guidelines and therefor the necessary directives to constructors, administrators, accountants, and financiers (and not the other way round)
Note that this is not to say that administrators, accountants, builders and financiers have no place and no say on financial or constructional etc aspects, but that they must not usurp the planning directorship
- (b) Methods. Sociological surveys of human needs as a basis for planning, forward exhibition of plans while still in their creative stage, public explanation and invitation of counter-proposals and suggestions of all types from the public, testing of effects of all developments and encouragement of all types of "feedback" to correct errors.
- (c) Decision-making Ultimate decisions to be in the hands of elected representatives of the people in some form or another, preferably the MMBW because the "field" of a redevelopment authority whilst it would affect mainly Melbourne citizens and would be therefor much narrower than Victoria as a whole (in which case State Parliament would be more appropriate) would not be confined to the Melbourne City Council area, or even to the area of the propose enlarged M.C.C. and in any case decisions bearing on all-Melbourne central facilities inevitable in redevelopment areas have an all-Melbourne importance (and so no Council or group of amalgamated or liased Councils is really an adequate substitute).

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Redevelopment-----For what ?

This vexing question, dear reader, we leave you to vex, and contribute to "Irregular" if so feel inclined)

May we take the liberty to introduce only what--to our way of thinking--appears to be emerging polarisation of divergent planning perspectives on this question ?

5/23/9

Dispersal

This system of thought runs something like this:

Redevelop by renewal "spot-development" techniques assisting people to "do up" old places, thus retaining the 19th century environmental character of the inner areas only acquiring, demolishing and re-building particular buildings where absolutely unavoidable, but in either case providing only low to medium densities so as not to generate car-traffic, thus making radial freeways less unworkable, railways less payable, and the underground undesirable, and concentrating higher densities to contain sprawl in the outer perimeter thus decentralising central city functions to the maximum possible degree in new outer centres served basically by the car.

Or

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Concentration

Somewhat like this runs the opposite pole of thought:

Redevelop new estates at high densities and by comprehensive design-planning techniques all areas with "worn-out" housing stock meaning where renovation of old houses is uneconomic or unsatisfactory, leaving only selected areas for preservation representative of the environmental character of earlier periods and where there are better-built houses emphasising improvements in all types of public transport and an increase in employment opportunities in the inner areas, predicating that radial transport corridor "spines" be based mainly on railways and not on freeways, with outer-suburban high density clustered near rail lines and with the best possible city underground design.

Or

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Hybrid-(or Synthesis ?)

Cross-pollination between these polar opposites is, of course possible.

To give two recent examples:

1. The proposed Doncaster freeway with a railway down the centre.
2. The new proposed High Density zones "Residential 1" and "Residential 2" in the LMBW "Residential Planning Standards" where these zones "permit" high density but do not compel it.

The exercise we set you, dear reader, is to determine which of the poles fits your value judgments the closest, or whether hybrids of one sort or another fit your value judgments.

In dealing with hybrids however you should remember it is not a simple matter of putting together a series of "I like" features, as if you were voting in a popularity poll, because a city is an organism that has to work.

You need therefor to determine whether your hybrid exemplifies the so-called British genius for political compromise, which, planning-wise may be simply muddle-headed eclectic grafting of different bits and pieces from entirely different over-all concepts which simply cancel each other out,

and amount in the long run to non-planning, or whether they provide a series of alternatives which are a workable ~~synthesis~~ synthesis of old forms with new ones made inevitable by the rapidly changing material conditions of land-use, building types, mode of transport and shifting sociological patterns of behaviour.

8/23/9

Warning

Warning, reader ! In doing this exercise do not imagine you can side-step your thinking by passing it to experts armed with computers to solve. Computers, which are going to be invaluable in helping experts devise feasible economic alternatives, given certain criteria or value-judgments, can never manufacture those criteria or value-judgments themselves. Explicitly or implicitly every computer program is based on a value judgment.

There is not such thing as the ~~extrapolation~~ extrapolation of a desired "quality of life" from computer-fed facts.

Reports, such as the 1966 Wilbur-Smith summary "Travel in Melbourne" give the impression they are based on facts for 1985 ~~xxx~~ about which there can be no argument, such as 3 times as many cars, 50% increase in train trips, 140,000 extra jobs in Melbourne, Port Melbourne and South Melbourne, 40% of the population within 8 miles of the G.P.O and 80% within 16 miles and so on.

None of the "facts" are unconnected with value-judgements. If the criteria have been "left out" doesn't mean they don't exist. If they have based them only on the extension of all present trends, then the value judgments are that all trends are desirable ones. This is the antithesis of planning because there are always good, bad and indifferent trends and the function of planning is to oppose bad trends with good ones.

3. Wise Words of Another Cabinet Minister

9/23/9. Mr R.J. Hamer, Minister for Local Government, addressed the Building Industry Congress last year. An excerpt from his speech, reported in "The Age" 20/1/69 p. 14. shows that there are new concepts abroad.

"Is the familiar grid-iron pattern of streets, with neat villa homes fronting on to them the best answer for the citizens of a modern city ? I suggest that we have some deep thinking to do about this---that designers, architects, developers and engineers alike have a challenging time ahead"

"Above all, we need research into the needs of people, and the best ways to meet their aspirations for a happy convenient, economical yet satisfying environment in which to live. Many people fly to the countryside at every opportunity. How much effort have we made to bring the countryside into the city ?"

"Many people treasure their garden plots. How many would be willing to pool their private gardens with others to form one large park on to which all the houses would front?"

"How many would be attracted to row or town houses based on a similar principle ? Is it really necessary to place the motor car at the front or could we not do with a smaller street for the cars at the back, in the nature of the mews behind the beautiful squares in London. Cannot the services, and above all the power lines be placed at the back, or preferably underground?"

"Is it sensible that with the horde of motor cars, the citizens should continue to face noise, fumes and danger continually outside his front door? Is it not possible to devise a layout in which children may walk to school, or women to the shops, through courts, precincts and small parks, without ever having to cross a road?"

"We may need to turn traditional ideas inside out. We may need to banish the motor car to a servient instead of a dominant position. We may, indeed we will, have to plan in larger

terms, in neighbourhoods rather than in small sub-divisions to achieve an overall scheme"

"We may need in various ways to encourage the large-scale development. There is at any rate the need for bold experiment and adventure for design and grouping and layout"

"I am convinced that Australia has something quite uninhibited to add derived from its own style of living, its climate and its imagination."

"Whatever else we plan, whatever else we build, we need to create a sense of belonging, and to devise communities---cells, precincts, neighbourhoods, whatever name you will---WITHIN the great towns where a man does still count, and where his immediate environment embraces enough variety challenge and satisfaction to allow him to live the full life".

Really that is quite a bib-full x !

Question is: does the Government (as distinct from Hamer) really think like that ?

If so, the new thinking hasn't penetrated through to the Housing Commission. If there is one thing the Housing Commission has developed to a fine art it is to break up a man's "sense of belonging" by scattering friends and neighbours to the four winds---quits unnecessarily.

As far as an "immediate environment embracing enough variety" is concerned the Commission displays great skill in avoiding the built-in provision of day-nurseries, kindergartens, youth centres, shopping centres or even schools---and such provisions as there are have had to be fought for by local citizens in many cases.---as an exercise in "Afterthought planning" it is the ~~xxx~~ very opposite to Hamer's idea "to plan in large terms, in neighbourhoods--".

Moreover, the Commission do not see to it that Jennings have to provide or leave room for such facilities either.

How foreign to Commission ideas it would be "--to devise a layout in which ~~women~~ children may walk to school and women to the shops, through courts, precincts and small parks, without ever having to cross a road". The sociology of the Commission seems to consist of the idea that any courts, precincts or small parks would be places where young girls would be raped, and the remedy is to have great "see-through" paddocks, with buildings erected on stilts so that no time can any of the inhabitants feel that they are in intimate human scale with their surroundings.

All the off-hand meaningless condemnation of high-density living as "concrete jungles" stems not from essential nature of such living, so much as from the lack of imagination that has converted them into unfriendly giants inadequately serviced even from a caretaker point of view let alone the point of view of welfare sport and culture---all of which is the very opposite to "devising communities---cells, precincts neighbourhoods---where a man does still count"

If the Government is serious about "turning traditional ideas inside out" it could start with the Commission and with Jennings, and put a stop to unplanned ill-advised developments lacking taste, social facilities and any human scale until such time as a few highly qualified planners have drawn up some plans, had them debated in public and improved them to the point where they win community acceptance.