

Cities . . .

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their own property, then, on learning that an interchange will be located to benefit their property, become its strongest supporters. We call it "planning a city" when we permit them to build high rise office buildings or luxury apartments without adequate mass transportation, and increase the congestion of already congested streets. We encourage the rich to move into "retirement villages" and escape most or all of their obligations to support education and other public services. We permit a landholding minority to defeat the tax levies required to support the education of all.

To "eliminate slums" we instead eliminate most of a city's supply of lower cost housing, then subsidize the building of sterile high rise prisons for the poor displaced from these homes. To "Renew" our "Urban" centers, we destroy the hundreds of small businesses, interesting little corners of a city, bars, cafes, dives, bookstalls, etc., which make a city interesting and worthwhile, and replace them with huge commercial buildings so expensive that only a sterile, mass-marketing operation can pay the rent. This is done in the name of "property values"—read "economic values."

Looking at the whole

So much of this results directly from looking at the part, not the whole. Yet we cannot blame the middle aged couple who "invest" in a bit of land to insure their old age against despair. We have set our social security and pensions so low, we have permitted the cost of medical care and other essentials to spiral so high, that it would be cruel to expect people to give up these hopes for a secure future. But what about the person who refuses to "invest," or the person who simply cannot afford to "invest"? What will happen to him in his old age? Somehow we must insure the security of all; we must insure that everyone can live, and can retire, in comfort and security. Perhaps we should provide a program whereby every citizen could "invest in a bit of land." If we returned to the simple system advocated by Jefferson, this is what would result. For then, the rents the land, which belongs to all, would ensure the future security of all. No one would need fear destitution in their old age or sickness. Everyone could "retire to Florida"—or wherever they wished.

Dependence on the land

Furthermore, if we all recognized our dependence on all the land, not just on the piece of land we claim, we would all have a stake in the preservation of the natural and human environment. Our government would no longer be, as it so frequently is now, an arena in which the conflicting interests of different property holders struggle against one another. It would be a forum in which different viewpoints of how to achieve a common goal could be resolved. It just might become a democracy.

Immanuel Kant said that a good basis for an ethical system would be, for each person to judge each of his actions on the following grounds: "Would I want for everyone to do this thing?" That may not have carried too much weight in his day, when there were a great many actions the privileged few could perform with no fear of being imitated by the masses. But today there are few actions we can perform without being certain that thousands of others will perform the identical action. Today we are compelled by our own technological success to subscribe to the Kantian Ethic. We must subject each habit and each pattern of consumption to this

"popularization" test, and reject it if it fails the test.

Individual priorities

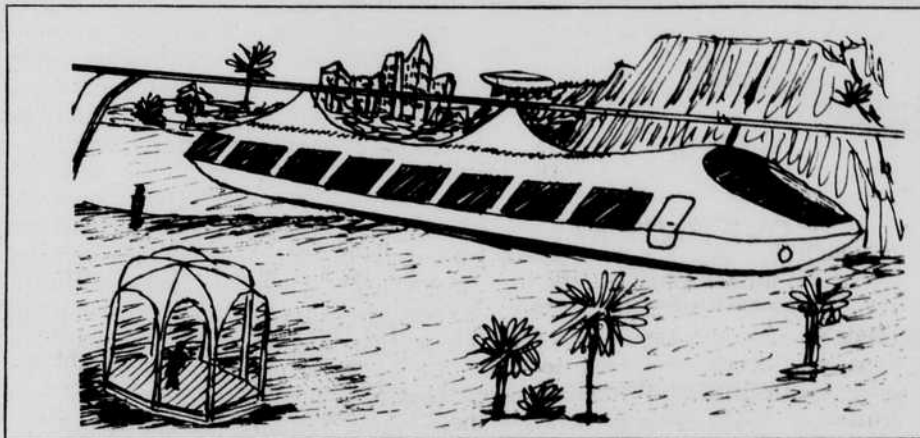
Further, we must consider the implications of each of our values and goals; we must recognize that many of them are mutually exclusive, and we must set priorities among them. Otherwise, we will be the victims of an indifferent corporate structure, we will be the victims of the habits and decisions of four billion other people, and we will be the victims of our own inconsistency and irrationality.

Those who object to urban sprawl and the exploitation of land for private profit must recognize that their home, their vacation retreat, and their investment decision are part of these problems. Those who object to traffic congestion, smog, the slaughter of innocents in traffic accidents, the failure of public transportation and the destruction of the intricate scale of the urban fabric, must forswear driving an automobile, save when that is the only way to get from where we are to where we need to go. Wherever possible we must ride a bus, walk, ride a bicycle, take a plane, train, or boat. We must insist on living within walking distance of work, school, shopping; we must insist that our cities be regulated and

plots—this is the type of provision which we should demand, not the huge quarter or half acre lots sprawling endlessly across the landscape. Properly planned, residences built eight or ten to the acre, and even more, provide more privacy and as much usable living space as residences built three or four to the acre; we should demand proper planning and a minimum density standard, so that a higher density of residential areas will support efficient, rapid and comfortable transportation, neighborhood employment, shopping, and cultural facilities, and neighborhood parks and recreation facilities. Our current zoning ordinances demand a large minimum set back and side yard for all single family residences; this wasteful practice should be abolished, or left to the discretion and taste of each individual homeowner.

Insistence

We can insist that no more land be sold from public ownership to private ownership, that public land be made available for private use by a specified term lease or a life lease, with land rents replacing property taxes as a source of public revenues. We can insist that our government be a systematic condemnation and purchase of developmental control or,



our residential areas constructed in a way which will permit us to find the kind of living quarters we need, within reach of these work, education, and commercial areas. We must insist that new residential areas be zoned and built in sufficient density to support public transportation, and existing areas be rezoned and their density increased as rapidly as possible. We must insist that exclusive land use zoning (which prohibits neighborhood grocery stores, shops, employment, etc.) be abandoned. We must insist on the provision of a comprehensive nationwide network of adequate and accessible public transportation, we must insist on public parks & recreation facilities, shopping and employment centers in the midst of the homes of those who need these things.

Connections

Those who object to the destruction of scenic values by hydroelectric dams, to the pollution of the air by steam generating plants and to the construction of nuclear-electric plants must recognize the connection between the electric powered air conditioner, electric super-appliance (self defrosting refrigerators, for example) and other such power gobblers, and the need for multiplying electric generation plants. The Trojan nuclear power plant is my air conditioner and yours, my computer and yours, my 500 watt super-hi fi and yours.

If we can do without a large private yard and garden, we must insist on living quarters built on as small a parcel of land as possible. Our current zoning ordinances specify a minimum lot size on which a house may be built—we need zoning ordinances which specify a maximum lot size on which a house may be built. A well planned network of small neighborhood parks would satisfy the outdoor living needs of most of us, if supplemented by small patio areas and, for some, small garden

preferably, outright ownership of all land currently in private ownership—preferably purchasing the land at the original, uninflated purchase price.

The re-ordering and rationalization of values and priorities I am suggesting will not be without sacrifice on the part of some. For most people, however, the sacrifice will be slight and of short duration, if we all get together on it, and for everyone, the payoff will be a city of the future, in which we can live in peace and joy. What kind of city will it be?

People oriented

Anyone who has ever visited some of the older European cities or wandered through San Francisco's older residential-commercial-cultural mixtures can guess at the feeling one would get in such a city. The streets would be somewhat narrower and parking lots would almost disappear. Much of the space now occupied by streets would be given over to wide, spacious sidewalks, on which there would be almost constant human (not automotive) activity. Sections of sidewalk would be leased for use by sidewalk cafes and bars, marginal retail ventures, street theater even. These sidewalk enterprises would come and go from week to week in an endless mosaic of sight, sound, color, not unlike the old "Saturday Market."

Supermarkets, department stores, cafeterias, drive-ins, and other offspring of the Automobile-freeway love affair would gradually disappear, or their form would be very drastically altered. These commercial forms are geared to a motorist, driving at twenty to fifty miles per hour; their size, form, and appeal are out of scale and repulsive to a pedestrian, moving at four or five miles per hour.

In their place, small specialty shops, such as those that flourish in most older neighborhoods of San Francisco, would spring up. The new trend, exemplified by the Saturday Market and other related enterprises in

downtown Eugene, toward "shoestring" businesses would grow stronger. Service would be much more personalized and diversified. This new breed of downtown merchants would welcome the same vendors of hand-crafted and exotic items that Eugene's downtown businesses are now trying to drive out, because these specialty shops and street vendors would attract the large volumes of pedestrian traffic required for the economic success of all the businesses.

Less lonely cities

Words such as "traffic fatality," "smog," "traffic jam" would disappear from the lexicon. More people would walk down almost every street, and every block would have more shopkeepers and others with a vested interest in public order and safety; the chances are that street crimes would fall off sharply. On the way to work or to the store, on stopping in for a beer or a cup of coffee on the way home from work, or on a morning walk to the park, the city dweller would encounter dozens of familiar faces, would be drawn into the fringes of numerous spontaneous people-fests. On the street we would be in the midst of a rich and familiar public life—in our home we might be as private and excluded as we would. The cities would be less lonely, their dwellers less desperate.

Most people would live in a rented flat; some might live in a luxury high rise apartment, a few would own their own home, on life-lease lots. These might have a small patch of lawn and a garden; the apartment dwellers might lease a small plot of ground in the nearest park and tend a bit of garden there, or he might have a bit of garden behind the apartment house—this is the system now used in many of the three to five unit buildings in San Francisco and elsewhere. Most of us would probably prefer to take the bus or the rapid transit to the outskirts of the city, where we could spend our Saturday on the public golf courses or at the public beaches. We might even belong to an urban based gardening co-op, which would lease a small farm not too far out in the country and manage it for us with our contributions of money and labor.

Our choice

Is this but a "pipe-dream"? As I said earlier, we shall have it if we want—or we shall have more of the same, but dressed up with ever fancier forms of private transportation and ever more complex forms of land non-ownership and mutual exploitation. The choice belongs to us. We can blame "capitalism," "the government," "the establishment" for the manner in which our cities are going to hell. But ultimately, General Motors and the Pentagon only give us what we demand. (Granted they also create that demand. But we are not enslaved to them—not completely, not yet.)

"The population explosion is everybody's baby." This bumper-sticker proverb applies equally well to all our other problems. The mixed up priorities of our society start with our own mixed up priorities. I cannot, immediately, effect the priorities of the society. I can change mine.

It is easy for us to sit around smoking dope and cursing the "hard-hat" or the "middle American" for copping out on the city, moving to the suburbs and messing up the countryside with his car, his boat, his camper, his "acreage." But then we dream of escaping "the establishment" by moving to a farm-commune with a big dog and a little garden, and we commute to school: our dream of peace and fulfillment is the blood-brother of the "hard-hat" or "middle American" dream. Change doesn't start with the guy next door. Change starts here. Change doesn't start sometime in the future, when "the government" finally makes it easier. Change starts now.

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