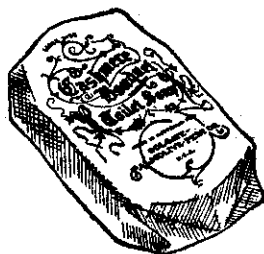


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To the Editor,

CIVIC AND COMMUNITY CENTRES

Sir,—When I am to be away from
Wellington for any length of time I
take the precaution of having the back
numbers of *The Listener* put on one
side for me so that I can read them at
my leisure on my return. This accounts
for the six weeks' lapse of time between
your publication of April 21 and the
date of this letter. Would you permit
me to correct a somewhat unfortunate
error in that issue—I refer to your de-
finition of a Civic Centre. Without
wishing to be pedantic, I think I can
claim to speak with some authority on
this point. The location and design of
Civic Centres is an important function
of town-planning, and my book-shelves
are full of books dealing with the his-
torical, functional, and architectural
aspects of the subject.

What constitutes a Civic Centre is
not a matter of opinion, but of fact.
The terms "Civic Centre" and "Comm-
unity Centre" are comparatively modern
names for something that is almost as
old as civilisation itself, namely, a place
to which people resort on ceremonial
or other public occasions and for social,
cultural and recreational purposes. The
Greek Agora, the Roman Forum, the
medieval place, and the more modern
market square and village green all
served this purpose. It is easy to under-
stand why municipal offices should
have been associated with the Civic
Centre. It was a matter of mutual con-
venience for the citizens and the auth-
orities; nevertheless, municipal admini-
stration is a secondary function of a
Civic Centre.

Perhaps the best evidence I can pro-
duce in support of my case is the follow-
ing quotation from an editorial which
appeared in the January number of *The
American City*, the foremost American
journal dealing with civic affairs:—

"The civic centre has an ancient heritage. It
reaches far back into the past and in all ages
has been a leading factor in shaping the
character of life in its time. On the acropolis
of the Greek city men discussed and matured
their civic and ethical ideals. The Roman
forum was the centre of the Roman Republic
and later of the Roman Empire. It both en-
compassed and nourished all its parts. During
the troubled Middle Ages the castle was the
focus of life on the feudal fief—for high and
low alike. When trade again flourished in
Europe, each town developed its great town-
square where the government and business of
its people were transacted, and where every
person in the town shared the pageantry and
neighbourliness of the age. The early Ameri-
can villages had their commons and greens
where much of the life of the community was
carried on. When pioneers pushed west and
built towns, this form of town planning was
often carried by them, and survives to-day in
the many town-squares dominated by the cen-
tral courthouse. But too many of these town
centres have lost their civic meaning, and
stand rather like functionless ghosts of a
more vital past.

"To-day, life is diffused. In the midst of
abundance we lack unity and direction. Our
communities have lost, or never possessed a
dynamic communal spirit such as that which
had its focus in the civic centres of the past.
We need to make a place in our community
plans for forging anew the community will,
one which can give character and purpose to
our towns and cities and shape the ideals of
our citizens. Our people need to cultivate
clarity and judgment by discussions; spon-
taneity and co-ordination by healthful play;
imagination and new capacities by study and

(continued on next page)