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BETTER PLACES TO LIVE IN

Planning the Towns of To-Morrow

TEN YEAR plans for new roads, railways, bridges, pipe-lines, aerodromes, reservoirs, and entire extra suburbs (not to mention tunnels) have been announced for Auckland and Wellington. Boroughs in various parts of New Zealand have sought blueprints of their futures from professional Town Planners. The National Council of Churches has called for "dispersion and decentralisation of population and industry." Even Britain's White Paper, which in April discussed building in all a score or so new towns may not look fantastic in New Zealand if this procession of proposals continues. But are they really planning—or just patching? What is town planning anyhow? And how do town planners set to work?

EVERY overseas visitor arriving at Wellington expresses two amazements—the first that the city can exist at all where it does; the second, how anyone could have thought of putting a city there. But then nobody did. It just grew. In the same way practically every town in New Zealand has been snowballed from small beginnings, unexpected and unplanned. The results are sometimes so unpleasant, and the prospects of further unplanned growth so frightening, that municipal authorities are taking their charges in hand to correct bad department and ensure healthier and more balanced growth. Actually every settlement of over a thousand people has been required since 1926 (by the Town Planning Act) to work out proposals for its own reconstruction and development. Civic pride and sound business have urged most to do so. But few have had the necessary staff. When recently, therefore, the Planning Division of the Ministry of Works found itself able to lend qualified men from its Town Planning Design Staff to local bodies there quickly accumulated a queue of towns waiting to be served.

But who are these Town Planners? And how do they set about their work?

The men are a very small company of architects, civil engineers, lawyers or economists who have taken a university course in Town Planning (by correspondence or abroad—we have as yet no such course in New Zealand), and have passed the British Institute of Town Planners theoretical and practical

exams. They are experts, not dictators (as all "planners" are assumed by some people to be), merely advising the people's representatives, with whom, locally and nationally, the responsibility for directing each town's planning lies. However, they are the rule-testing exception to the definition of experts as people who know more and more about

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by A.M.R.

less and less, for their object when beginning a plan is to know just everything about the region they are to prescribe for.

Citizens in Imagination

This means becoming, in concrete imagination, a daily citizen of the town: knowing "in one's bones" from what way comes the rain and how often that wind blows; how the soils of each suburb and street hold water; what happens when the rivers rise a foot, or two feet; how much shade trees will throw in each month of the year; what folk favour for their front lawns, and like what are their backyards and back gardens; how far women can push prams with pleasure in the climate; where their eggs and vegetables come from; how often fires are needed; how fast traffic speeds through what streets; where farmers park cars on sale day; how many children are likely to be in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, respectively, two, fifteen and forty years hence; and what hopes for expansion, what new processes, are being hatched by factories or firms already in the town or intending some day to come in . . .

All This and Much More

It sounds a lot to know, and it is. But obviously no one could plan intelligently a town layout that would make life simple, fuller, happier, for the citizens unless he knew all these and two hundred more. Fortunately, modern techniques come to the town planner's aid in helping him to build quickly a more detailed and balanced picture of a place than probably even its oldest inhabitant possesses. He has not only plans and maps, for example (including soil maps and contour maps—to show rises and hollows), but aerial photos which, pieced together, reveal much that even actual street-walking and house-calling never can. He can study wind charts, sun-incidence diagrams, traffic tallies, income information and population curves. By this means, in fact, he can sit in a balloon over his town and

see in a few days or weeks all that occurs in an entire twelve months in streets, sections, factories, theatres, churches, schools, playing fields and houses. Thus he sees children run across through-traffic streets, even when they have not yet been born in houses not yet erected along streets that so far exist only on maps. He sees future tired housewives leaving, for future tired husbands later to push uphill, unprotected prams and groceries at the foot of "surveyors' streets." (Too often in New Zealand surveyors have applied to maps of country they have never seen the axiom that a straight line is the shortest distance—and semi-perpendiculars like Hay Street and Grass Street in Oriental Bay, Wellington, have resulted.) He sees women (again actual or likely) struggling to dry clothes on the lee side of smoke-stacks, he sees wardrobes and pianos being craned into hillside houses. He sees schoolchildren whooping in ex-swamp backyards.

For weeks, perhaps months, a town planner broods over the documents that call up these pictures before ever he sets pencil to paper. That is his job—to lengthen scores of lives and to save scores of thousands of man-hours in the future by imaginatively seeing to-day what this road or that building will lead to.

But meanwhile he is gathering also other sorts of facts to complete his picture of Town X. Painstakingly he is classifying, from the civic files or from personal visits, the use to which every section and building in the town and its outskirts is put. He is discovering who owns each, and by what tenure. He is noting what features of his landscape are "given"—unchangeable and irremovable, that is to say, for all practical purposes, such as through railways, rivers, harbours or volcanic "lines." He is forecasting, too, the settlement's probable line of development by seeking out advance knowledge of the possibilities of the district that it serves—whether for farming, or manufacturing; whether it will become a crossroads of communication or pass off the beaten track as rail gives way to road and road to air; whether it is attractive to industrialists, or to holidayers, or to retired people . . .

What Do People Want?

Then, when the Planner has his full local knowledge, what will he do with it?

He cannot turn it straightway into a plan for X, because to do that another kind of knowledge is needed, a knowledge of what people want.

No one knows that, of course, not even the town's inhabitants. So again the town planner has to set a trained imagi-

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