



... and ANSWERS

mediocrity. In the past we have been adventurers, a lot of the time out of our own land in wars overseas. But today we're living on the threshold of a very exciting time, and our great need is to set off on another adventure, this time the adventure of the mind."

This theme was emphasised later when Dr W. B. Sutch, who was chairman of the Gallery Committee which arranged the exhibition, "Homes Without Sprawl," said: "By our present methods of housing and land development, wasteful as it is, we're depriving ourselves of the full benefits of such things as opera, art, ballet, cafes, even pageantry—all those things one should be able to enjoy at leisure in the city. This list is illustrative and not necessarily the kind of community relaxation and development that would occur in New Zealand, but here we don't give community life of any kind much opportunity to occur. Economically, we could build many more facilities if we weren't building so many sewers. So far our development has been suburban and not urban, which means that we don't get the spiritual and cultural advantages that can come from a community of hundreds of thousands of people. We're not yet creating the right conditions to satisfy our own inner needs, and we suffer from a kind of starvation of the spirit."

Besides looking at some of the ideas behind planned living and planned town development we had promised this week to give some of the reactions of the citizen-consumer to them. These have been drawn from conversations about the "Homes Without Sprawl" Exhibition, and from last week's articles, and the questions have been put to the experts concerned.

Q: In New York 15 million man-hours a week are spent in travelling time. Is that time really lost? Is it lost time to read the paper in the train instead of the office, or to read a good book, or even sit and think? Admittedly, straphanging is lost time, but how many people must straphang?

A: (By John Watson, who based a study of "Travelling Time to Work" on figures derived from the New Zealand census of 1945). There's no easy answer to this question. New Zealand is the only country that has tried to look at this nationally, and included it in the census. I don't think you can read or think very well while travelling, and the medical implications are not fully studied yet—the effect nervous strain and fatigue imposed by rush hours has on industrial efficiency and general health, for instance. The Director of Research of the New York City Planning Committee, Henry Cohen, wrote in 1951, that "It has been estimated that in transit alone New Yorkers spend 500,000 to 600,000 man-days of employable time each day. The estimated costs of the waste and loss due to traffic congestion are fantastic, and the strain on the individual is virtually inestimable. In New Zealand one aspect of such travel does concern me, and this is the way our dormitory suburbs tend to separate home and work. This often creates divided loyalties in the father and often leads to the mother taking over the suburban social organisation. Children—boys in particular—are less likely to know what their father is doing all day, than, say, the son of a farmer. This isn't altogether desirable, and can create problems in the schools. The fathers, on the other hand, are often apathetic about suburban organisations, especially if their interests are mainly vocational, as so many are. I think you can do a lot about these human problems, and if you do then I don't necessarily believe that urban sprawl is a bad thing."

Q: The possession of a quarter-acre section is a tangible symbol of civic pride, it is also a symbol of belonging, of being a part of the area you choose to live in. If our housing methods are radically changed, what can we substitute for the quarter-acre section?

A: Community spirit, for instance. We would have to avoid the mistakes we have made with many of our housing

areas and allow, amongst other things, for greater recreational facilities. If we are thinking of large blocks of flats, then considerations other than economic ones will have to be the dominant motives for developing them. Economic considerations will not be conducive to better human relationships unless you plan for them.

The drawings reproduced on these pages—two of those on display at the "Homes Without Sprawl" Exhibition, provoked other questions, answered by an architect as follows:

Q: Is it possible to soundproof flats effectively?

A: Sounds in dwellings are of two kinds, airborne noises such as talking, and impact noises. Airborne noises are substantially less in flats than in conventional dwellings, and impact noises are not at all difficult to prevent—you will not get serious noise that way. Sound insulation, while not perfect, is better in flats than in any other conventional dwelling.

Q: In some of the blocks advocated in this scheme you would have your neighbours breathing down your neck—could you isolate yourself from what's going on next door?

A: There is complete privacy inside the dwellings, and outside this is gained by deft objects such as walls, appropriately placed trellises, trees and greenery. These provide a visual and sound barrier. We have planned in several different ways to provide for privacy.

Q: How could plans such as this be implemented?

A: There's nothing to stop this type of thing being built by the Government, who are in the best position to show the way. It could also be built by the speculative builder, who could make it a spec. development similar to the buy-your-own flat idea, except that here you would buy your own house. It is necessary, however, for any such development to take place according to a pre-conceived plan. To sum up, it could occur through all the conventional channels, but it does require a lead.

HERE dwelling units step down a steeply-sloping spur served by a pedestrian way—car access is on one side and parkland on the other. Two-story units, one unit per floor, each has its own private plot of land, the lower unit opening one way and the upper the other. These give all the advantages of a single unit house—privacy, garden and space.

Q: Does New Zealand's earthquake record account for the prejudice against flats?

A: No, it doesn't make any important difference at all—I haven't heard earthquakes raised as an argument at all.

Q: "The State house at its time was remarkably enlightened"—May not these projected flats or terraces in a few years look as pathetic and depressing as some of today's State housing settlements?

A: No, I don't think so. The fundamental error of the State housing was understood at the time by a great many people—this being the universal levelling they represented. What we have in mind represents an infinite variety—they can be designed for streets, districts and towns, they also take account of different slopes of the ground, and the availability of local materials.

Q: I suspect that flats are simply one price we pay for the dubious benefits of a technological civilisation.

A: Flats as such are a traditional European way of living, and have nothing to do with the technological age whatever. Statistics show that 30 to 40 per cent of our houses contain only one or two people, and for many of these flats is the best way of living.

Finally, we had one last question for the Town Planner: Has New Zealand a national survey or plan of any kind?

"Yes, a survey is at present being prepared by the Town Planning Department. It is a long job and a slow one. It will give detailed information on the rocks, vegetation, climate of a particular area, and will show what man has done to the land. A great deal of the information is coming from various Government departments, and is being brought together by trained staff."