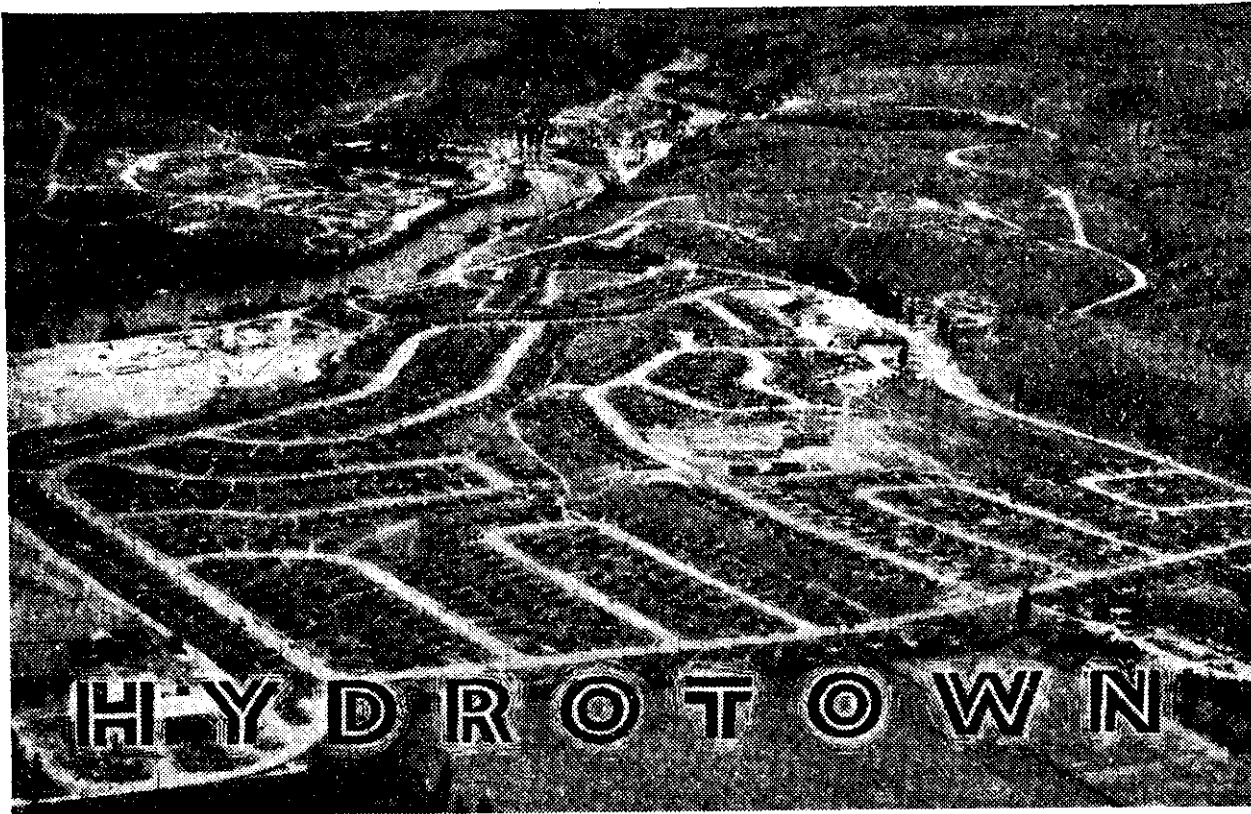




IN New Zealand's gold rushes, towns erupted into life, boomed for a while as the miners were quickly and expertly mulcted, then quietly died. Often they left no other trace than a heap of rubble or a derelict pub. The modern (1946-57) boom town of Roxburgh Hydro will come to no such end. To mark its passing there will remain a dam 1200 feet long and 185 feet high, and a book* which records much of the township's peculiar social history.

Roxburgh Hydro was not, as might be expected, New Zealand society writ small. The author rightly describes it as a transient settlement with little past and no future. The population changed constantly, redundant or dissatisfied workers moving on and others arriving. Numbers fluctuated according to an approximate measure of the labour requirements at the dam. The polyglot assemblage included, in 1954, people of 24 different national origins, New Zealanders being the largest single group, but a minority of the whole. They referred to themselves, only half humorously, as D.P.s.

The works project called for vigour and brawn, a factor reflected in the age distribution of Hydrotown's inhabitants. There were more adults from 20 to 40 than the national average, and consequently a greater number of children, but the teen, middle and old age groups were smaller than the national average. With 1341 adult males to 659 females, the sex distribution was likewise unusual. In the delightful terminology of new science, "The absence of young single women in the community gave rise to issues of considerable sociological significance."

In the agency game, seniority is said to be indicated by the acreage of executive desks. In Hydrotown, status bore a close relation to housing floor-space. Single men lived in huts at camps adjoining the main village, married workers in two-bedroom houses of 520 square

feet, executives and professional people in three-bedroom houses of 820 square feet segregated in the vicinity of Bendigo Crescent, and senior administrative staff in 1000 square foot mansions on Teviot Street and Sandy Point Road. "Snob Alleys" these streets were called.

Hydrotown lacked the row of saloons which marked previous mushroom towns, but enjoyed almost every other facility for pleasant if not riotous living. Besides the usual shops, there was a community centre of two buildings which could be used for cinema, theatre, dancing and indoor sports like badminton, a library, a committee room for club meetings and a supper room. Outside there were playing areas, five tennis courts, and an adequate swimming pool. The township was "dry," but there were pubs in towns near by. An illustration of the service they gave arises in the chapter devoted to relations between the various national groups. A New Zealander speaks:

"If I were the manager I'd pack up all the Contract Workers and send them home. They are not a good crowd, and have done a lot of harm to this project. They used to come along to the dances in old clothes and open-necked shirts. And then the pubs were closed down because of them. (Did they really close them down?) Well, not exactly closed down completely, but for a fortnight the police saw that they closed at 11.0 p.m."

Yet these manifold community services, even when combined with high wages and good living conditions, failed to make Hydrotown a happy and well-integrated settlement. The Otago papers not infrequently reported a new dispute and disgruntlement at the project.

Dr Campbell's case-study of Hydrotown pinpoints some of the social factors which led to this kind of discontent. To discover them he studied the physical composition of the town, the project and the camps, formally interviewed a cross-section of the workers,

held discussions with works and union officials and with a large number of ordinary workers, and for a time worked at the Hydro himself as a labourer. His detailed diary of one day's work in this capacity deserves reading for itself alone. It is at once a precise record of what might be called the "manana" theory of labour and a diverting essay in national (or perhaps international) character.

The survey reveals that where the abstract "economic man" may be satisfied by adequate pay and conditions, the living human worker needs more. He must understand the object of his particular job, the system behind his incentive payments, and the reasons behind the decisions he carries out. He must be bossed by men whose ability he respects, and expects in return that

his own work shall be appreciated. A common statement about relations between workers and management was that it was "just like the Army."

Friction between workers of differing national origin seems to have arisen partly out of this job dissatisfaction, partly out of the somewhat segregated housing conditions, notably in the single men's camps, and partly out of personal racial intolerance. The temporary nature of Hydrotown militated against rapid assimilation, but, within the town, desegregation might have helped. The Dutch, for instance, were mostly concentrated in Camp 2, where "they spoke their own language, to a large extent cooked their own meals, and had a minimum of contact with other nationalities. They even disowned their own members who married New Zealand girls and lived in the Village." Efforts to promote social mixing seem to have met with the same obstacle which beset other community projects—apathy. The cinema alone suffered not at all from this. "On Sunday evenings it was packed with adults and youngsters eager to learn more of what the Wild West was like in the days when men were men, and women loved them for it!"

In defining Hydrotown, Dr Campbell breaks completely with the academic tradition that research work shall be unreadable or incomprehensible, or both together. His material is presented clearly and simply, in a colloquial style that amuses while it informs. If New Zealanders emerge as the group least unpopular with the others—well—there are figures to support the contention. And if a proportion of the Dutch have nothing but unfavourable comments about themselves, the typist rather than the research worker is probably to blame. We sympathise with Dr Campbell too in his encounter with that printer's devil whose function it is to ensure that the causal is always the casual in the New Zealand printed word. He has produced a book which should while a pleasant hour for the general reader as well as provoking thought in the Departments of both Social Science and Public Works.



MEN of 24 different nationalities worked on the Roxburgh project—six nationalities are represented in the group shown working here

*HYDROTOWN, by W. J. Campbell; University of Otago, cyclostyled; 7/6.