

BALTIMORE CHAPTER A. I. A.

ARCHITECTS' REPORT

"We need to move our thinking into this part of the Twentieth Century."—HUGH R. POMEROY.

"BEAUTIFUL BUILDINGS, UGLY TOWNS"

With permission of the editors, we reprint herewith from the Editorial page of the "Morning Sun" of November 7th, A Letter from Britain by Lord Winster, on a subject both timely and of interest to architects, builders and planners.

London.

Sir Hugh Casson, who was director of Architecture for the Festival of Britain in 1948 and is Professor of Interior Design at the Royal College of Art has been talking on the radio about architecture in America today. Like myself, he finds a visit to America gives him "exhilaration." Unlike myself, it also causes him "exhaustion." "The spectacular scenery of America is as famous as the inexhaustible friendliness of Americans" I agree. Sir Hugh being an architect went to America to see architecture and saw "some of the most handsome, exciting, and technically inventive buildings that you could hope to see anywhere." Since the war America has had a passion, if not a panic, for building which has transformed the appearance of every city and stimulated architects and engineers into "adventurous effort." But it takes more than beautiful buildings to make a beautiful city. "It is just this problem that Americans have failed so far to solve. You could almost say that while they possess the most beautiful buildings in the world they also possess the ugliest towns."

The British have a word for man-made ugliness—Subtopia. "In its most virulent form you will find it in Main Street, U.S.A.—hopeless miles of suburban housing draped in wires and cables, shacks and hoardings, rotting car cemeteries, decayed building lots. Nobody seems even to be aware that something should be done about it."

* * *

Sir Hugh is most appreciative of what America is doing to handle the domination of the automobile, the parkways, clover leaves, ingenious systems of traffic circulation, multi-story car parks. He admired also the shopping centers, drive-in churches, banks and cinemas. Some of the beautifully landscaped suburbs, the admirably planned national parks, such building projects as Lake Shore Drive, Rockefeller Center, the TVA "are wonders of the modern world." He has praise for the gridiron plan of so many towns. "To stand in the center of a city and see its streets run right and left to the horizon is an unforgettable

experience. Here and there attempts are being made to fight downtown decay. More and more schools of architecture are studying seriously problems of townscape and civic environment."

But, meanwhile, the mess goes on growing under the pressure of post-war building and the automobile, "a monster insatiable as any medieval dragon that daily gobbles up more and more land and leaves behind it a trail of squalor and large-scale litter."

Then there is the resistance of a highly competitive society to any planning or control—a belief that economics should determine environment, that all land is there for speculation, that advertising, exploitation and industrialization betoken prosperity and, by consequence, happiness. "The old pioneering attitude that there is plenty of room over the hill, and if you do make a mess, well, move on and leave it to somebody else to clear up. Some of these points of view may be less admirable than others but they are active, definite, passionate reasons, better than the foggy, nerveless acquiescence which so often in Europe masquerades as intelligent detachment."

But if we accept reasons for the mess need we accept the mess itself? Americans may fairly retort, who are you to criticize? Sir Hugh's answer is that to Europe America is not a New World but our New World, and if it disappoints the disappointment is personal to us. And for some of us, "what makes the ugliness of Indianapolis or Detroit so alarming is not its hapless endlessness, nor the apathy of the citizens but the suspicion that here is the city of the future. The American way of life is so attractive in its dynamism, so easily imitable that it is hard to see how American Subtopia, thriving upon indifference will not eventually conquer the world."

* * *

Are we then to give up the battle and surrender? There are those who support Subtopia, deriding those who protest it as graybeards and maintaining that it is a type of folk art, a natural and healthy reaction against the artificial elegance, daintiness and charm of the past. To them, "a juke box flashing and

jerking to itself in a corner is in its vulgar vitality a genuine piece of mid-century 'pop art,' and to have it elegantly designed would be ludicrous. A vulgar thing should look vulgar. But a suburban street draped with wires and hoardings, dumps and shacks, with blown paper and rusty fencing is not folk art, it is a symptom of mediocrity, of couldn't-care-lessness, as degrading as it is repellent."

Asked how they could bear to see their beautiful buildings in surroundings which would make a Balkan sanitary inspector blanch, American architects replied that they were so busy doing architecture that they couldn't worry about the spaces between their architecture. "Americans do not defend Subtopia, nor do they sit down under it. They have not yet got round to noticing it. When they do, it is possible that even Los Angeles may be decently rebuilt. But how long can they afford to wait? Already the ugliness of American cities is getting to the point when it will be beyond correction and generations are growing up who have known and will expect nothing better."

* * *

Certainly, what has to be recognized in England, and perhaps in America, is that there is neither virtue nor vitality in ugliness and disorder. It is deplorable that wires and cables cannot be put underground because nobody will pay the cost. Hoardings and sky signs are anathema in the country but give sparkle, color and interest in the city. But why leave their siting to individual advertisers working independently? They could and should be related to the buildings on which they are erected. And much can be done by tree-planting and paint—"devices in which Americans excel. This is not a matter of taste; there is value in lucidity and order and the pursuit of standards of beauty. To ignore or stifle them is to condemn ourselves, in the New World and the Old, to lasting mediocrity."

Regional Conference

As previously announced, the Baltimore Chapter will play host to this year's Regional Conference of the Middle Atlantic Region of the AIA on April 18 and 19. Under the able leadership of Archibald C. Rogers the Committee has developed a program with "The Architect and Tomorrow's City" as its theme and has obtained a list of speakers that should make this one an outstanding forum. The Friday schedule starts with a welcome at the Raw Sea Food Bar and includes a luncheon with Victor Gruen as the speaker; a seminar on "The Nature of Tomorrow's City" moderated by Carl Feiss, and with Messrs. Victor Gruen, Edmond Bacon, and James W. Rouse, Jr. as panelists. Regional Director J. Roy Carroll, Jr. will preside at the banquet in the evening at which the main speaker will be one of the country's most important political figures.

On Saturday, a panel moderated by David A. Wallace, and filled by Messrs. Jefferson B. Fordham,

Charles Blessing, David M. Walker, John P. Robin, and Herbert S. Greenwald will try to decide "How to Build Tomorrow's City." To Mr. Herbert S. Greenwald of Chicago will fall the honor of valedictorian and the task of summing up the two day proceedings.

Besides numerous opportunities to bend the elbow with friends, the side shows will include a tea at Hampton House for the ladies; a visit to the Naval Academy at Annapolis; a conducted Architectural Tour of Baltimore, and the Grand National Point to Point at Butler, Md.

Headquarters will be the Belvedere Hotel where all events will take place. Accommodations are limited so make your reservation early.

Producers Council

On January 30 the local chapter of the Producers Council, in conjunction with their parent organization, performed a real service for the building industry by staging an all day seminar on curtain wall construction. All phases and several competitive types of panel wall were presented. In case you weren't there we give some of the most interesting points:

(1) Glass spandrels use tempered glass to care for heat build up. (2) There is expansion of five millionths of an inch for 1° F. Temp. change per 1" of glass. (3) Allow minimum 2" clearance between structural frame and back of panels. (4) Provide vents—avoid sealed panels, put vapor barrier on inside. (5) Don't use round holes for bolted connections, allow for movement. (6) Manufacturer should be required by specs. to name erector for approval with bid. (7) Make special section in specifications for "Curtain Wall", all as part of general contract. Include among other things: Flashing of curtain wall at roof, etc., all part of curtain wall work, also see that roofer does proper job of capping at top. Erection, mullions, panels, etc., all to be clearly called for. Guarantee, say average of 2 to 5 years (at least 1 year). Either manufacturer or erector is curtain wall sub. and has full responsibility.

Standing Committees for 1958

At the risk of being boring we publish the long list of the Committees for the coming year. It is interesting to note that it takes over fifty members to do the work of the Chapter. Most of the Committees have held at least one meeting already and are tackling projects ranging from the immediate staging of the Regional Conference to the establishment of an Architectural School:—

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It is appropriate to mention here that the National AIA Committee on Education is chaired by Alexander S. Cochran.

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ARCHITECTS' REPORT

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Hours: Eleven to Five.

Chapter News

New Members: A very large group of Corporate and Associate members were welcomed into the Chapter at the February 12th meeting, as follows: Corporate, Sidney Kalin and Edwin Litzau; Associates, Albert K. Broughton, Robert Burkins, John F. Galton, Paul Heineman, Robert Lance, Frank Norwicz, David Scott, and John A. Webb, Jr.

Business of the Meeting: From the five-minute reports presented by the Chairmen of the six standing committees and two special committees, activities of the newly formed committees augur well for a busy and fruitful year for the Chapter. If you have not yet been asked to be a member of a committee, you are urged to contact the Chairman of the Committee of your choice or the office secretary. There is much to be done and your help will be appreciated.

Next Meeting of the Chapter will be on Wednesday, March 12th at the Park Plaza and it is now anticipated that Mr. David A. Wallace, AIA, Director of the Planning Council of the Greater Baltimore Committee, will be the speaker.

New Publication: The first mock-up of the Quarterly is being assembled and if we keep moving the first issue will hit the news stands on schedule in September.

Miscellany

Cranbrook Academy of Art announces four awards of \$1,000 each and four tuition scholarships of \$500.00 each to talented students for advanced study in architecture, ceramics, design, metalsmithing, painting, sculpture, weaving and textile design. For detailed information write Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, prior to March 1st.

Anonymous Critic: An anonymous non-professional paid us the unusual compliment of reading one of the recent issues carefully and returning it with some two score grammatical corrections, all in an article reprinted from a sister publication. He made his point and jacked up our standards when they were apparently sagging. In the future we will be more selective in our reprints and more careful with our own language. Maybe we should go back to drawing!

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