the AIA releases a national policy statement

see editorial page 10
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In this issue:

John Gow Meem, FAIA, takes this opportunity to answer Mr. Anthony C. Antoniades, AIA. In the November/December 1971 issue of NMA, Mr. Antoniades gave his ideas about the methods by which the architectural heritage of New Mexico might be expressed in contemporary buildings. Mr. Meem disagrees and on pages 8 and 9 tells why.

And—

The AIA looks ahead. See editorial on page 10. J. P. C.

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Mr. Anthony C. Antoniades' article appearing in the November-December issue of New Mexico Architecture, entitled: "Traditional Versus Contemporary Elements in Architecture" gives me a welcome opportunity to make a statement on my own architectural views while commenting on his article.

To begin with, his article implies that certain buildings on the University of New Mexico campus (the Fine Arts Building and Johnson Gymnasium) which he uses as examples, are intended to be "traditional" as opposed to "contemporary" in design. As the designer of the Johnson Gymnasium and many other buildings on that Campus, I can state categorically that the intention was to create a contemporary building, meeting all contemporary functional requirements, but using certain regional elements of traditional design in such a way as to recall the rich heritage of our Southwestern environment, including architecture and history. There is a vast difference between this approach to design and that assumed by Mr. Antoniades:

"... many contemporary solutions try to appear traditional, through the exploitation of visual means by promoting traditional resemblance." The implication is that we are trying to fool the beholder into thinking he is looking at a real adobe, which of course would be faking.

An analogy to the use of elements of the past in contemporary work is to be found in the design of the Parthenon. As everyone knows, it is made of marble, yet the architects consciously or unconsciously, chose to recall details of the earlier traditional wood-

Church of San Estevan, Acoma Pueblo, begun in the 1620's.
en temples by using Doric columns which recall the earlier round wooden posts; and in the positioning of the triglyphs, which recall former wooden rafter ends. They were not faking, but remembering and adapting.

Further, in Mr. Antoniades' article, he criticizes the Fine Arts building because its scale is not the scale of the Taos Indian Pueblo. But as most everyone knows, our architectural inheritance consists not only of aboriginal forms as developed by the Indians, but also those modified under the influence of Spain and especially in the early Franciscan Missionary churches. The architect of the Fine Arts Building was Mr. Edward Holien, my former partner and I happen to know that the inspiration for it was not Taos Pueblo, but the inspiring scale and mass of the Church of San Estevan at the Pueblo of Acoma (see the accompanying photo) of which George Kubler in *The Religious Architecture of New Mexico* says: "... responds to the spectacle of Acoma, dominating the gigantic boulder which is its pedestal, with the massive forms of a clean, simple style of building." To arbitrarily exclude the use of such precedents from our contemporary design is to impoverish our culture.

The Johnson Gymnasium, designed by the writer, also comes in for criticism on the score that it is out of proportion, presumably on the basis of the scale of Taos. He calls it: "... a giant looking adobe which has grown in size without gaining anything in spirit" (see accompanying photo), and remarks that the interior spaces are supported by steel frames instead of vigas. Once again, one must repeat that this building was designed as a contemporary structure to meet the functional requirements of a gymnasium. It is not trying to imitate an adobe. It is recalling some of the latter's characteristics such as flat roofs, sloped walls and earth colors as a reminder of the environment, and doing this in preference to hard straight lines associated with much of today's design.

To deprive the architects of the emotional satisfaction of recalling the shapes and forms associated with the history and tradition of the region in which he lives is very much like disapproving of nature because she makes a son's face to recall that of his father's. Can it be that we architects of the twentieth century, in our devotion to the standards set by science and technology, are depriving ourselves of equally important requirements, demanded by man's emotional nature? —John G. Meem, FAIA
AIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS RELEASES A NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENT

THE PROPOSAL TO GUIDE THE NATION'S GROWTH WILL BE VOTED UPON AT THE AIA NATIONAL CONVENTION IN MAY

Bound into this issue of NMA is the first report of AIA's National Policy Task Force. A year of intensive study by the members of the Task Force has resulted in a far-reaching, perhaps to some a radical, statement which proposes to change the "ground rules that now shape, and distort the shape, of American communities." With a full realization that urban spread and urban blight are destroying the heart and soul of America; that "much of what we have built, largely since World War II, is inhuman and potentially lethal"; that "we cannot long endure an environment which pollutes air, water, food, and our senses and sensibilities," the statement points a way to achieve a national strategy for growth and development, but with creativity and diversity.

Although the proposals outlined in the statement mainly refer to the larger and crumbling metropolitan centers, much that is recommended might well be applied to New Mexico.

It is tantamount to disaster for us to continue to allow the self interest of large land development companies to serve only their own stock-holders, with little or no consideration for the long-range impact that their short-range goals have upon the future environment of New Mexico. To continue to despoil our own air with soot, to continue to "develop" productive crop land and grazing land into poorly planned retirement "ranches" is to court an eventual ecological catastrophe.

The government of New Mexico must become involved in constructive long-range land use planning. Perhaps the state will find it necessary to begin to acquire large parcels of land to hold in trust for the better use and eventual development for all its citizens. The 1972 legislative session has ended, and again, the attempts to bring some order to the rampant sub-dividing of the state has been crushed by the powerful real estate lobbies. But herewith be they warned! Their free-wheeling, free-selling life is short. The citizens of New Mexico will demand that their lobby — the vote — will shortly outweigh the legislative pressures of the real estate interests.

By the release of this National Policy Task Force report, the AIA puts its aims firmly toward a future of diversity and freedom of choice for all within the framework of a healthy order. At its national convention in Houston in May, the general membership will be asked to act upon this statement.

To many members of AIA the public release of this report prior to its being acted upon by the membership at large was "premature." It has been called "a step towards socialization." Certainly it does call for major political changes.

Accordingly, we urge you all to read the attached National Policy statement. Further, we seek the reaction of all our readers to the guidelines and principles set forth as a means to "achieve coherence and not let freedom vanish into chaos . . . We urge the nation . . . to make of this country what it can and must be — a society confident and united enough to enjoy the richness of its diversity. Livability of that kind does not come by accident; even free choice requires design." — John P. Conron

To the Editor:

As a former resident of New Mexico, I was appalled to learn from a nationally-televised news broadcast that the Land of Enchantment is allowing its natural beauty to be destroyed irrevocably by a handful of persons seeking to profit at the expense of everyone who lives in or visits the state.

As those professionals most acutely aware of the impact of development on the environment, the architects of New Mexico might well offer their expertise and influence in preventing the destruction of one of the last unspoiled regions in America. The opportunity will never come again.

Sincerely,

LIGON B. FLYNN ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS
Raleigh, North Carolina
Joseph Chipman

With Mr. Chipman we agree!

Through the pages of NMA the architects of New Mexico have frequently expressed their concern. Further, through the state and chapter A.I.A. organizations, and by individual actions the architects have sought sound land use practices throughout the state. They will continue to push for needed legislation and action on the state and local levels.

J. P. C.
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In an era when we can see the culmination of all the earlier trends in American institutions, there is again a wave of utopianism. Again, communes are springing up and young people are taking themselves into the countryside and living in small, isolated groups.

. . . . what are the most likely predictions one can make concerning the future of America's utopian communities?

The "common sense" basis for prediction of the fate of communes is the concept that most Americans have, at some time in their youth, staged a rebellion of sorts and have later recanted and joined the system. Many people think of hippies and communards in terms of themselves and, consequently, predict the same future for the communes. They see the same causes and, therefore, the same results that impinged on their own lives, as impinging on the lives of commune members.

However, two factors make the "common sense" prediction an unlikely one. The first is that, even were the kind of rebellion of the communards the same as that of previous adolescent rebellions, never before in history has there been such a high proportion of people in the young and rebellious age group.
The fact that over fifty per cent of the American population is under the age of twenty-six comprises a structural change in American society. The sheer number of people in this demographic category indicates that there probably will be some sort of effect from the change. In other words, it might be said that alternative structures are springing up due to a shortage of available slots in American society in comparison with the number of people needing to be placed in those slots.

The second factor is that the groups to which young people previously belonged tended in the past to have the sanction of the "elders." Fraternities and sororities, though tolerating rebellious behavior, functioned, in fact, as parentally-approved organizations for the purpose of limiting the associations of the members to socially acceptable social strata. The Boy Scouts and other groups served the interests of parents who were inclined to favor these organizations because they helped to socialize the young into their own cultural traditions. This cannot be said of the communes. If communal society contains elements of the cultural institutions in the larger society, the over-all effect is certainly not one to encourage participation in the American "system" in the usual sense. Rather, the communes exist outside the influence of adults. Further, due to the supportive nature of groups, practices that are strictly confined to youth are much more powerfully encouraged by the cohesiveness and totalism of the group life style than would the same practices if they came under the influence of parents and other adults. The power of the peer group, the institutionalization of value systems, and the rewarding nature of the primary group, as against existence in the competitive American economy, all militate against the prediction that accords with the individualized personality traits of young people ignore the qualitative changes that occur when cohesive groups form.

Further, psychologistic explanations fail to take into account the possibility that the economy may not be able to absorb the high proportion of college age youth regardless of their personality patterns. The political disenfranchisement of youth, and the educational system, which has yet to discover an adequate technique for educating in an era of mass society, both militate against accounting for hippy and commune movements in terms of individualized personality traits. In other words, permissive child rearing may have had an effect on the personalities of many middle-class young people, but it is more likely that a second social influence, the increasing dominance of the teenage peer group, has had a greater influence in the formation of communal structures. A closer look at the economic opportunity for middle-class youth needs to be taken. There is a very real possibility that psychological alienation from American institutions is not merely an emotional state, but rather that there is a concrete set of circumstances, such as, saturation of the middle-class occupational labor market at the root of this large-scale alienation.

An historical mode of prediction of the fate of communes might be based on what we know about the monastic movement of the middle ages. The monasteries gained the sanction and the support of European societies, largely because they functioned for these societies as repositories for the technology and knowledge of earlier ages; they were refuges for second sons who did not inherit under the feudal laws of primogeniture, and they took widows and orphans who, otherwise, would have become paupers. They functioned as libraries, museums, social welfare agencies, and models for the religious ideology. Were communes to gain the support of the rest of society for some function such as this, their future would be assured.

Also the nineteenth century communes, in general, served as welfare agencies. The Shakers, the Hutterites, the Llanoites were self-supporting. They did not utilize state facilities, such as mental institutions or charity homes, and they took out of the labor market many people with skills which were not in demand in a day when the immigration of unskilled labor vastly outstripped the number of unskilled jobs. They further had the full support of American society, except for the rare occasion when society forced the abolition of such practices as polygamy among the Mormons. Otherwise, utopian communities tended to be seen as groups of God-fearing, independent, and productive individuals who had taken themselves out of the competition for available jobs. In a few cases, they even managed to force adjustments in the American cultural tradition. The Shakers were responsible for forcing a change in the American legal code to accept the legality of communal property.

If communes come to be seen as illustrations of American ideals, or if they are recognized as desirable repositories for surplus people, or if they can be seen in any way to function to the benefit of American society, their future may be long indeed. The Hutterite communes lasted over four hundred years and are still extant. They, however, have not ignored the value of public relations, vis à vis, the larger society, and they have had a hand in shaping the positive view outsiders hold of their communities. At one time in their history, the Hutterites developed a high degree of skill in the production of medicines, in nursing, in canning and mechanics and, therefore, their services were much in demand by the local citizenry. It is not out of the realm of possibility that communes may find some set of services and functions roughly duplicating those of the monasteries or the Hutterites, which would gain them the support of society.
Regardless of the role communes may find to play in the American social structure, certain practices in the recent past have most certainly contributed to the commune movement. First of these has been our practice of keeping our young people in mothballs, so to speak, at universities for longer and longer periods of time in order to train them for the advanced technological skills necessary for careers in a technocracy. Further, the more complex knowledge becomes, the more there is to learn and the longer it takes to learn it. The man who makes the common sense prediction about the future of communes forgets that where a Bachelor's Degree would suffice in his day, a Ph. D. is now barely sufficient.

Further, changes in family structure over the past fifty years have reduced the cohesiveness and the authority of the family and increased the influence of the peer group. Young people have grown up more accustomed to others of their own age, than did their fathers.

Political impotence in a mass society has been an increasingly important factor in the defection from traditional parties. The combination of rejection from active participation in the economic life of the country during their most energetic years; the rejection from the possession of political influence and the inability to form effective interest groups like other demographic categories (such as labor unions) due to their disenfranchisement, indicates the possibility that the communards have not rejected American society as much as American society has rejected them.

Further, the failure of the established churches and schools to support the family in its effort to inculcate traditional values in the young make them less closely tied to the cultural traditions than were their fathers. Thus, it may be true that the tendency of American society to refuse youth an active role is reinforced by the very tenuous bonds between youth and society in the first place.

In sum, then, we have to reject single-factor answers for both the cause and the future of communes. Historical parallels may shed light on some factors involved, but no previous age had the special element of the post-industrial society as its backdrop. Only one thing is certain. The number of communes is growing. They are the most numerous on the east coast, the west coast, and Canada. Communes are springing up in countries like Australia. There are rural and urban communes. There are mystical and political communes. No one knows the number of young people who are choosing this kind of life style, but it is growing every day. Although the ideologies and the institutions within these communities may vary, the common elements are first, a homogenous age group and second, the small, face-to-face nature of the communities. It may well be the smallness, the primary relationships, and the easy comprehensibility of the commune that is, in the last analysis, the thing that draws the young American individual into a commune.

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