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Title:

Address to the Housing Seminar conducted by the University of Adelaide and the S. A. Civic Trust

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ADDRESS BY DON DUNSTAN, PREMIER OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, TO THE HOUSING SEMINAR CONDUCTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE AND THE S.A. CIVIC TRUST.

17/9/70.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure tonight to be speaking to you on "The State Government's Responsibility for Housing in South Australia".

As we stand at the moment, the South Australian Government is the largest single provider of residential housing in the State. The South Australian Housing Trust last year built 17 p.c. of the State's houses, while through the financial support of the State Bank some eighteen hundred houses were financed. This is a role the Government intends to continue, expand and renew. The tasks of architects, planners and builders in the modern world are infinitely more complex and demanding than they were even fifty years ago. It is no longer sufficient for houses to be built, and new areas to be developed, with no other planning guides but those of simple commercial piece-meal functionalism. Modern planning should be expected to provide for an environment which is both visually attractive and socially efficient, with all that those two ideas imply.

It is a truism, but we do live in an era of rapid technological and cultural change. Populations are increasing at unprecedented rates; our technology is potentially explosive. Modern societies and cities create problems of pollution and social dislocation that have never been faced before. And therefore we must have planners, designers, and builders with sufficient imagination and inventiveness to cope with these new and possibly disastrous phenomena.

As you know, I have just returned from a very quick visit to one of the most highly industrialized nations in the Asian region: Japan. It was perhaps the kind of trip which should be made by all those involved in the planning and organisation of the modern city.

In Tokyo, it is possible to see an almost totally unplanned city environment - mile upon mile of irregular streets, criss-crossed by ugly freeways, studded with jerry-built high-rise apartments, unattractive and low lying traditional residential areas, and mushrooming commercial monoliths. Over and above this mess spreads a blanket of grey smog through which the residents of the city can observe at random moments in the early morning the dead red disk of the sun.

It is, at times, like the end of the world. Tokyo epitomizes the problems that the modern city planner has to deal with. But Adelaide is not Tokyo. Nor thank goodness, is it Sydney or Melbourne. Nevertheless the example of such cities as Tokyo, where modern technology is running out of control, should lead us in Australia to resolve to ensure that such a situation never occurs here. Our planners, our builders, our architects, and, might I say, our politicians, must be aware of the forces with which they are dealing. Their endeavours must establish effective developmental standards.

But it is not only necessary for architects, planners and builders to use, creatively, the abundance of new materials and design techniques that are now available. They must also take intelligent note of the lives and desires of people who are to live in the environment being newly created. This, of necessity, means that they should become involved with sociological issues - the quality of city life, the quality of family life, the demands of urban and suburban development, the nature of community activities (whether they be sporting, shopping, recreational or cultural) must all be considered.

As I have said the responsibilities of builders, planners and architects are now far more than just the creation of houses or subdivisions. Builders and planners are involved with the welfare of society as a whole. As far as my Government is concerned, we have a clear policy on these matters: we are now in the process of endeavouring to implement procedures that will ensure that the

best possible design and planning standards obtain in this State. In South Australia today, second rate design standards apply to most of our mass housing projects, whether in the public or the private sectors. In addition, as a State and as a nation we play far too little attention to the provision of an effective social environment in which both a spirit of community and a provision for individuality can play a part.

This really need not be so. In South Australia we have a wide range of first class building materials. We are even advanced in some areas of mass production construction techniques - and I mention in this regard how South Australia has led Australia in the use of pre-manufactured stone-aggregate building components.

In fact our technology is of an excellently high standard, and there are many designers and planners of ability waiting for a fair go. They must be given it by both Government and private developers. The spirit of architectural adventure is something which must be encouraged.

But when I say a spirit of architectural adventure, I am not in fact talking about grandiose experimental designs such as may be seen at Expo's or in the Sydney Opera House. What I am referring to are the kinds of integrated city and suburban, high-density, and low-density, town and suburban planning concepts that can be found in places as widely disparate as Mexico City, Copenhagen, Algeria, Israel, and even poverty stricken India.

In many of these places, and especially in Scandinavian countries, the social, political and economic standards are not unlike those we have in Australia. And yet their cities are not subject to the aesthetic, social and environmental confusion that occurs in Australia. And the reason for this is clear. We have on the one hand private sub-dividers and builders who cater to a community with conservative, sub-divisional housing tastes. They are automatically in conflict with any government housing agency endeavouring to work with an eye to socially efficient, integrated, low and high density housing concepts.

In Scandinavia we can see the practical effects of an intelligent attitude towards planning and building. Single level houses are placed in clusters that relate to the landscape, existing trees, and to the social facilities available to the community. Low-rise inner-city flat development is designed in conjunction with the provision of creches, pre-school facilities, libraries, and community services. With high-rise development, adequate provision is made for privacy, the democratic mixture of a variety of economic groups, and again a full range of community facilities. At the moment our housing development in Australia is by and large designed to appeal to Mrs. Everage. What has been presented to Australians almost exclusively as the only form of housing within the pocket range of the average salary or wage earner is a suburban cottage on an allotment so large as to require a fair amount of time and attention to maintain it in reasonably neat order. We are not only encouraged to "try it in Highett" - we are given little alternative. Given the budgetary arrangements of our public authorities and the economics of speculative building it is not entirely surprising that this should be so, because this is cheapest for them. The average housing commission or trust, building society or speculative builder does not in any real way have to take into account in budgeting what is the general cost of the community or urban sprawl. Not only do they not appear to think about the social difficulties created, but within the terms of their budget they don't have to provide for general services, certainly not for the extra cost of extending water, sewerage, transport and of building schools and freeways. The cheapest way therefore (if we look at the budget of a public or private developer in isolation) of providing housing for family units is to go out, buy land in an area where land is still cheap, subdivide and put up cottages. This is so even with public housing authorities.

Examine the budget of these together with the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement and the way in which State budgets are structured and it will be seen that overall social and community costs are

not charged to authorities. Each Department's lines are concerned with the responsibilities of that Department. Moneys are advanced to Building Societies without relating their programmes to overall community costs. Too often in budgetary as well as in administrative terms decisions are made as if government departments are separate compartments from one another.

The rising costs to the community of urban sprawl have not been sufficiently emphasised. To allow inner suburban areas to decay and to spread the population of a city further and further from the centre means that public transport costs are inevitably increased and must be subsidised. People in the outer suburbs cannot afford economic fares for travelling long distances to work. At the same time the number of short haul fares in the inner areas will decline. Public Transport deficits can be expected constantly to climb with continued sprawl of the suburbs - and in the meantime inner city areas will decay and be denuded of population although they are provided with services upon whose capital cost the community is still paying interest. The provision of water and sewerage to spreading suburbia is increasingly costly - and increasingly difficult. With summer water restrictions now in most capital cities how long, given projected city growth, can we continue to pour water out for cottage gardens for every family? The cost of freeways - inevitable in the Australian metropolis if it continues to spread - is stupendous. By tying ourselves in housing development almost entirely to cottage development and making no provision for new attitudes and relationships which are becoming widely evident we are, I believe, storing up a great deal of trouble for ourselves socially. And of course the town planner's answer to this situation is to produce a variety of different forms of housing while maintaining cottage development for those who still want this traditional form of family centre. Provision of terrace houses, apartments, multi-storey flats, small home units and pensioner housing, all of which can provide pleasant surroundings in which to sleep and eat without being burdensome and time consuming, would appear to provide an answer.

The most obvious activity for us to take in this area would be to provide higher density redevelopment in the areas of urban blight.

Here, however, we are immediately faced with financial and administrative difficulty. There is not sufficient public pressure for this kind of development and except in the most expensive home units there is not money to be made from it by speculative developers or where there is money to be made from it as part of a large urban renewal scheme there is not more money than can be made by the standard forms of speculative development in outer suburban cottages.

The State Governments in Australia are responsible for housing development generally. While the Commonwealth has been able under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement to lay down conditions upon which the States will spend Commonwealth grants for housing, the Commonwealth too is affected by the fact that so far the standard demand for housing has been for the suburban cottage family centre. So there are no political pressures of any great moment upon the Commonwealth Government to provide moneys for urban renewal. In the U.S.A. the Federal Government does underwrite the cost of purchase of redevelopment land. Rebuilding the areas of urban blight is uneconomic unless one can underwrite the cost of redevelopment land because although the land is not always vastly expensive it is certainly very much more expensive than the land bought for cottage development on the edge of the city area and there is no way within our budgetary structure of setting off the cost of increased services to outer-suburbs as against the cost of acquisition of urban renewal land. The savings on one score does not provide money for purchase or compulsory acquisition of land in the parts of our cities suffering from urban blight. So while both Sydney and Melbourne have seen some redevelopment programmes, adequate overall programmes still await the provision of the necessary finance by the holder of the purse-strings upon whom there is no effective political pressure to make the

necessary grants. Unless those who foresee the problems can make their demands felt at the effective political level we will go on with a cottage development which will be appropriate to the social relationships of a smaller and smaller proportion of the individuals within our society.

In South Australia the Government intends however to face the issue as far as it can. Our planning schemes will involve redevelopment opportunities attractive to private developers, builders, architects, and planners alike. They will include not only tower units, but walk-up flats, cluster housing, and patio houses. And while in proposing such kinds of development we expect to hear from conventional building groups that most empty of excuses that "the people have been given what they want", the fact is that the people of Australia generally have really never been given a choice. Until the mid-fifties the situation was that you either had a suburban bungalow or nothing at all. It is the government's belief that people should be given a choice of the kind of housing best suited to their needs, and that a complete variety of housing types should be provided in the community. In this we have a number of firm proposals. We intend to proceed with such redevelopment schemes as that planned for Hackney. We intend to encourage the redevelopment of inner-city areas, especially the South and South Eastern sections of Adelaide itself. And we intend to set out, in planning schemes, redevelopment opportunities that will be attractive to private developers, architects, and planners. In addition, we wish to establish a policy which ensures that regulations governing building in South Australia are Australia's most advanced. This will mean, in particular, a revision of the Building Act to allow for more flexibility in acceptable housing types. We also intend to encourage manufacturers of new building materials, fittings and systems. We would like them to set up their Australian base in South Australia. South Australia

could be a building industry research, test and education center. But to effect this we earnestly desire and seek the help and advice of the professions most signally involved in raising design, building and town-planning standards. As a Government, we believe that the South Australian Housing Trust should lead Australia in the provision of modern housing estates and imaginative inner-city development. It should be the Housing Trust's job to set standards that would be so advanced and desirable that other developers would either join with it or take over the lead. But in setting this up, it is upon the architectural profession that we will depend for guidance.

In addition, since it is not the policy of the government to stifle new forms of development in the city - we are currently investigating what some architects and builders have found to be an excessively rigid bureaucratic interference with development projects. But in doing this we need the best possible communication with the architectural profession as a body and with its individual members. I trust that we will achieve this in the very near future.

Finally, might I say that individual governments exist by the will of the people, and so the houses of the people are just as important as the Houses of Parliament. We have come a long way since the 'dark satanic mills' of the industrial revolution, but even now, just how town planning can help or, if it is bad, hinder the quality of life in a State is only beginning to be understood and accepted. I now look forward to the State playing an ever increasing role, through constructive and imaginative planning, in the provision and encouragement of good and modern housing in South Australia.
