

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS IN 1980, AS ENVISIONED IN 1955

by Thomas Read

In November 1955, this article appeared in the departmental publication, *Externally Yours*. This being the date envisioned, Thomas Read was asked if he would now reflect upon what "stimulated the satiric funny bone of a junior F.S.O., vintage 1955".

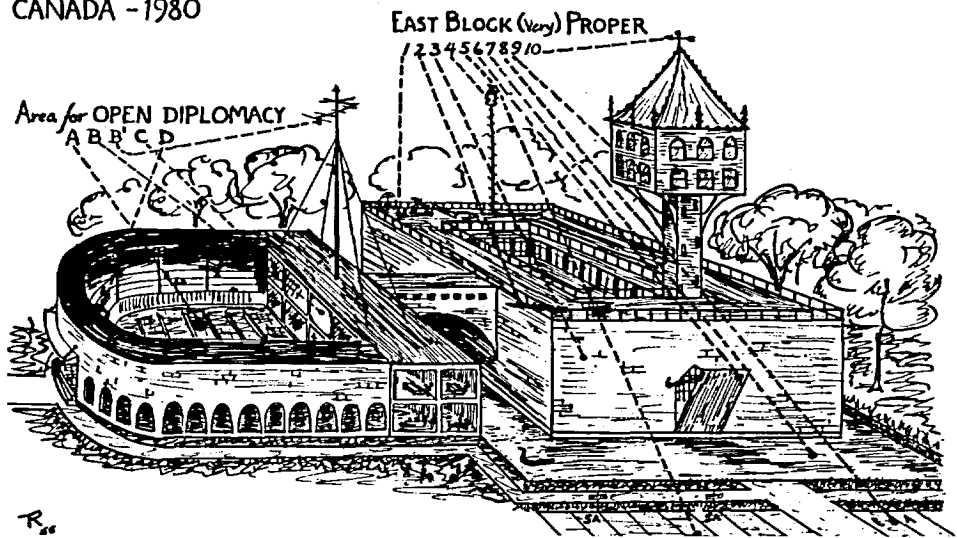
No choice has been made of a site for the new building and if the central government should copy the civic government no choice will be made for some years. A bold decision is required. The penchant of External Affairs and diplomats for the salubrity of Rockcliffe Park makes it logical to suggest that Rideau Hall be expropriated and the new building erected on that site. It is not the business of the External Affairs planners to suggest alternate accommodation for His Excellency the Governor General.

Description

In considering the problem of design for a new East Block a planner is faced by a number of difficulties which are indeed hard to overcome. Principal among these are the liking of other departments for the space occupied by the Department of External Affairs. In an endeavour to achieve the lofty level of thought which is erroneously attributed to the influence of 14' ceilings, and/or the stimulus of many square yards of green, orange and black linoleum, various other departments have already made savage inroads on External Affairs space in the existing East Block. No doubt some elevation will be achieved by these departments when the existing colour scheme is revitalized by the spread of crimson felt along the hallways. (Privy Council Office doors were red.) However the problem to be met in designing a new building is to prevent future invasions when the magic of the old East Block is discovered to be illusory.

This has been handled in the attached design by a return to the historical basis of diplomacy — the fortress — coupled with equally ancient weapons of defence. A windowless building (3) having one entrance, and only one, has been allowed; this is suitably guarded by a moat, filled with crocodiles (7), a drawbridge and a portcullis (6) of suitable viciousness, the latter two being electronically operated by a device made sensitive to the approach of acquisitive members of the Privy Council, the Prime Minister's office, Finance and Trade and Commerce (whose interest is of course not in the East Block itself, but in our supply of Ambassadorial furniture).

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The possibility of the failure of the devices provided accounts for the plank (2) on the roof, a means of getting rid of unwanted visitors which habitually engenders a healthful feeling of elemental satisfaction in all except the victim.

Another difficulty has been taken care of in the design submitted. "Open" diplomacy is still a current catch phrase in the lobbies of the world and while importance still attaches to it, it is vital to have the Canadian Department of External Affairs pay at least lip service to the idea. Consequently, an Area for open diplomacy has been allowed. This, in point of fact, is a narrow two-storey building, constructed mainly of plate glass, along one side of which is attached a semi-circular enclosure (A) amply provided with seats for those who wish to see Diplomacy At Work. Offices in this area (C) would of course be allocated only to morally unapproachable officers and staff.

A notable feature of the "Area" is the giant size television set (B) which would provide interest during "quiet hours". Unfortunately this would not be available during the World Series when the signals received by the aerial system (B) would unquestionably be required in the SSEA's office. During that period, however, the Information Division commentator, normally situated in a gondola under the roof could take over with readings from "The Book" (on Department regulations) or "Canada and the United Nations".

In designing the East Block proper, the assumption has been made that the usual Civil Service formula will apply. $n/2 \times 1/x \times 60\% = \text{number of rooms}$. In this, n is the number of officers, 2 is the number of officers to a room, $1/x$ is the attitude of the Committee and 60% is the most we can hope for.

Since the formula makes no allowance for registry or for stenographic pools the net effect will be to have ab initio the comfortably chummy atmosphere so long a feature of the East Block.

Elevated to the roof, nay, even higher, have been a few suites of offices. The tower (9) which by a happy stroke of imagination will be constructed entirely of ivory (on a base of pre-stressed concrete), will allow for uninterrupted meditation, even contemplation, on the part of certain officers whose deliberations are now all but drowned out in the hurly-burly of the present building and the N.P.O. (New Post Office).

It is envisaged that the USSEA will have his office there, Personnel, Protocol and Political Coordination may well find in the tower their proper place. All will find value in (10) a wind indicator installed to show the direction of over-currents from The Hill.

Thought has also been given to the welfare of staff and visitors. Room in the foreground at (8) has been allowed for at least two parking spaces to be allocated to External Affairs personnel. It has been some time since External Affairs personnel have been able to park so close to their building.

At (5) parking space has been reserved for diplomats. To reciprocate the kind treatment our personnel so often receive overseas, these spaces will be marked only by the two large signs (5A) both of which read "No Parking".

One final word seems required. In view of the increasing importance of communications, and the constant need for improvements and guarding against breakdowns, a pigeon loft (4) has been provided to serve as the nerve centre of the New Division.