

# WHERE WE LIVE

Canada's western seaport city, Vancouver, will play host two years hence to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. Authorities on urban problems from all over the world will meet from May 31 to June 11, 1976, to discuss six vital issues:

- 1) Human needs in the environment of human settlements
- 2) The role of settlements in national development
- 3) The structure and quality of the environment of human settlements
- 4) Special problems in human settlements
- 5) Managing human settlements
- 6) International cooperation

In a preliminary survey, Britain's Barbara Ward has summed up the predicament confronting urban man in a preliminary study titled *Human Settlements: Crisis and Opportunity*. She was invited to set down her views by the Canadian Government.

**M**ISS Ward begins by reminding us that increasing urbanization will place more than half the human race in cities and towns by the turn of the century—three-and-a-half billion out of the six-and-a-half billion men, women and children who will be crowded onto the planet by the year 2000. In developing countries alone, city and town dwellers will increase threefold from 1970's 464 million to 1,437 million. To house the world's urban hordes, more buildings will have to be constructed in the next three decades than were put up in the whole of mankind's history.



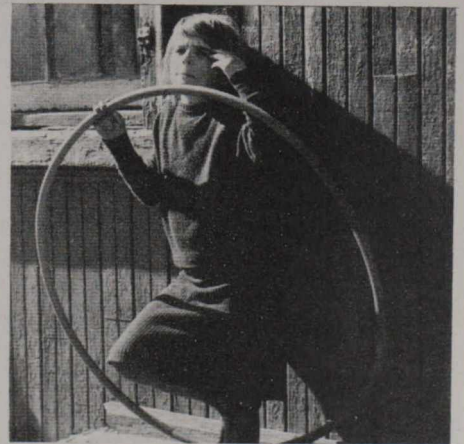
Along with the increase in the quantity of urban life there has been and will continue to be, unless governments act fast, a steady deterior-

ation in quality. That is what the Vancouver conference will basically be about. Tourists flock to the old, unspoiled parts of cities or to the wilderness: man doesn't much care for the cities he has lately built. The increasing pressure on urban amenities has spawned a major part of the pollution which threatens to reduce the environment to one big garbage heap. The philosophy of the consumer society has culminated in the five-mile traffic jam. Paradoxically, the worldwide trek from the country to the city finds its worst expression in the developing countries, where poverty and squalor on an unprecedented scale exists side by side with the modern travails of industrial smog and longdistance commuting.

So far it has proved beyond human talent to solve these problems or to avert them by intelligent anticipation. Urban growth is too fast, too unpredictable. Partly to blame are economic values which ignore costs in terms of pollution and the quality of life. The Vancouver conference is being held in the faith, that given the political will, solutions can nevertheless be devised, such as have already been successfully applied in certain settlements.

The variety of needs catered to by a modern city notwithstanding, the basic biological needs are uniform. Within the increasingly standardized matrix of concrete and steel that is

the contemporary city, it is these basic needs that are being neglected as far as a significant portion of the population is concerned. In the developing countries, although it is the lure of wealth that attracts people to



the cities, many of them remain unemployed. They cannot afford basic amenities and are reduced to shantytown subsistence. The Vancouver conference may undertake to define the minimum standard of living acceptable in human settlements for the guidance of urban planners around the world.

But curiously, even where this standard is surpassed by a wide margin, cities are more and more being written off as failures in terms of the quality of life of the average citizen. Violence, crime, congestion and attendant inconvenience, air and noise