

Present structures impede change**Hellyer: urban problems aren't insoluble**

Paul Hellyer

Excalibur -- Tim Clark

By GREG McCONNELL  
A "congenital optimist", Paul Hellyer seems to feel that our urban problems are not insurmountable.

Before an audience of about 60 urban studies students last Monday evening, the former transport minister outlined what he saw as the most important problems and suggested how they could be solved.

Hellyer's frustration over federal inaction on the recommendations of the Hellyer Report on Housing, and the federal government's general slowness to act in urban problems, prompted his resignation from the cabinet last April. Hellyer feels the city of the future ranks second only to peace on mankind's agenda for the next 100 years.

He enumerated traffic strangulation, pollution, land speculation, and alienation as the specific challenges we face. He felt that transportation was the most vital.

"We haven't yet come to terms with the automobile," he said. "We haven't yet admitted that you can't jam all those cars downtown at rush hour."

He envisaged an efficient public transit system, supported with

money diverted from highways and expressways. His optimistic prediction included a system that could move people from place to place in a city of four million in an average of 20 minutes.

Massive indifference stands in the way of pollution action, Hellyer pointed out. Although Toronto's pollution has aroused many of its inhabitants, most Canadians care less, he said. He said public education about the problem is essential.

Hellyer is doing his share. He is presently writing a book on urban problems, and gives a great many speeches on the topic.

The task force on housing, established when he was transport minister dealt extensively with land speculation in urban areas, and recommended federal action in the form of heavy taxes on speculative profits, and subsidies to municipalities for the purchase of hinterland.

In Toronto, for instance, a 50-foot lot sells for about \$15,000, whereas, a similar lot in Saskatoon may be purchased from the city for about \$3,000.

The problems of alienation could be alleviated by better design in cities, Hellyer contended. A sense of community can better be

developed in an area designed as such. His vision was one of small communities connected to each and the central core by an efficient transportation system.

What stands in the way of realizing these aspirations? "The greatest impediment to change is structural," Hellyer said. He pronounced our political and social structures as decades, even generations, behind technology.

The most obvious example, is, he said, Canadian federalism. Hellyer was not pessimistic, however.

"When it comes to getting around constitutions, it can be done in most cases with a little ingenuity."

Always the politician, Hellyer used a joke to describe our fetish with federalism.

The British student, faced with the topic "The Elephant" entitled his essay "The Elephant and the Empire". The American student wrote on "How to Build Bigger and Better Elephants." "Sex and the Elephant" was the French student's topic... and the Canadian student wrote: "The Elephant: A Federal or Provincial Responsibility?"

The provincial governments seemed to draw a lot of Hellyer's fire. He said they were afraid of giving their big cities enough power to cope with urban problems because they would be a direct challenge to provincial power.

"Queen's Park is afraid of Toronto, Quebec of Montreal, and certainly Victoria of Vancouver."

Hellyer's favorite beef is "red tape". He feels that bureaucratic rules are stifling an imaginative response to urban housing problems, and that in fact, there is an artificial shortage created by all the red tape.

The housing task force recommended more freedom for large developers, so that they could use creative ideas. Hellyer cited examples from his experience with Curran Hall, a Toronto home-building firm, to back his contention.

The overall goal is to allow the individual as much choice as possible, to make the city a convenient and stimulating place to live, Hellyer said.

Hellyer thinks Canada has a great opportunity to pioneer in this field. While European cities are just about to copy the Toronto metropolitan model, we could be shedding outmoded forms of government and bringing our cities up to date with technology. And Hellyer has a talent for making people believe it can be done.

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