

THE CANADIAN CITY OF 1984

In an address to the Canadian Institute on Public Affairs in Toronto recently, Mr. Stewart Bates, President of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, gave his views on how the Canadian city of the future is likely to develop.

Of that city, Mr. Bates said there are perhaps some things of which we can be reasonably sure - one is inherent in the pledge or attitude of the citizens. He said that today there is no Canadian pledge and he paraphrased the Athenian pledge of over 2,000 year ago "...we will strive unceasingly to quicken the public's sense of civic duty; that...we may pass on this city, greater, better, more beautiful than it came to us." To this, Mr. Bates added, the ordinary Athenian subscribed.

He went on to say:

"The composition, the shape, the patterns of urban growth in the next 25 years will be, of course, a product of the governing attitudes of the times - yesterday, today and tomorrow. Attitudes may change not at all. In which case our cities would presumably simply expand themselves as they have been doing since the war, except faster. They would sprawl into the suburbs at something like 100 square miles per year. The six million Canadians now living in our 15 major centres would have become 12 million. The nearly two million metropolitan houses would have become close to four million, and the metro areas would have grown to twice their present size. The incisions through the centre of the old cities would have become larger, if only to keep communities open. To make communication as easy as it is today (sic) much of the old city will have become freeway. The cost of suburban land will, in these conditions, have become very high, probably higher than the value of the structures that sit on them.

"I should doubt if it will happen this way. I should expect governing attitudes and public opinion to have undergone quite substantial change and these changes in attitude will affect many aspects of urban living. One basis of this speculation is the large proportion of Canadians under 18, about 38 per cent of the population - as against 27 per cent under 18 in the U.K.

"This very large, new generation, is already displaying new characteristics. Their parents have been mobile, changing houses and cities frequently. Even last year, three out of every seven buyers of NHA houses were buying their second one - and were quite ready to let the building industry, or the landlords, know all that had been wrong with the first one! They and their children have no great historical attachment to the local municipality that now forms an integral part of the metropolitan area of Montreal, or Winnipeg or elsewhere. They tend to visualize

the metro area as a whole - perhaps father drives across it daily to his work - and can see little reason why the area does not have an area government, instead of a host of small municipalities.

"These children, mainly under 18, have quite different standards from those of my youth. Many of them cannot remember when there was no electricity and all that means. They have grown up with the white kitchen slaves (refrigerator, stove, washing machine, hot-water heater), with automatic heating plants, with television, with automobiles. For many under 18, these are but the normal trappings of North American living. For me each remains a wonder I've seen unfold historically, an innovation, a luxury, perhaps even a status symbol. To these children, such things are not miracles of the family altar. Younger people are perhaps more inclined than we are, to regard these things as possessions to serve human purposes, and they may be able to take a more objective attitude to the existence of the gadgets. Certainly many teen-agers have already shown they regard the family car as expendable! Perhaps after the first flush of enthusiasm, the new generation will see how the gadgets (particularly the auto) can easily enslave the suburbanite, and can just as easily stifle the real values of urban society if allowed to run riot downtown. Even now in some streets in the world, the car is denied entry.

"Another feature affecting the present and future characteristics of our cities, that may be undergoing change, is the view on home-ownership - which, of course, is related to the major suburban expansion since the war. It is interesting to note that in 1958 about half the houses built in our metropolitan areas were for rent. In the cities, half the families do not own their own homes. For them, a trend towards more urbane forms is present even now - the search for more privacy and enjoyment in attached houses which are constituent to big cities. I've already mentioned some homeowners trade their houses more often than they do their kitchen stoves and fur coats, if not quite as often as their cars. Perhaps a new generation emerges that regards the house as a temporary convenience, to be adapted to the various stages of family growth. They marry younger in distinction to my generation, have a definite early period of saving (and apartment dwelling), a relatively short period for a family house, and then a relatively long period of expectation of the couple living alone together when the family has gone - the latter due to the longer life expectancy than in my generation. Against such a background, the house, its nature, its location, varies from stage to stage, the pre-childbearing and post-childbearing ages call for a high proportion of convenient, cheap, accessible apartments. And at any moment, this

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