



**ANARCHY 97**

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# **ARCHITECTS AND PEOPLE**

**ARCHITECTS** are very busy, they have heavy responsibilities, they have to deal with planners and economists and geographers and surveyors and civil servants and committees and boards of directors and civil engineers, structural engineers and electrical and heating and ventilating and mechanical engineers and draughtsmen and model makers and perspective artists and material manufacturers representatives and estimators and quantity surveyors and cost accountants and filing clerks and secretaries and building contractors. They use up a lot of stationery and sometimes work with a set square and ruler. Eventually after a great amount of revision and compromise they get structures built, in which are put **PEOPLE**



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# Architects, buildings and people

**TOM WOOLLEY**

A MANIFESTO WAS PRODUCED BY STUDENTS OF ARCHITECTURE from Spain, Britain, Sweden, German Federal Republic, Belgium, Austria and France, at the International Union of Architecture Students Congress in Vienna last summer. The Manifesto declares:

"The world as it exists today does not allow the architect to choose whether to be a pure artist or a servant of society. The architect is dependent on the political structure of the state. The existing bureaucratic system leaves no open space for him to work, either consciously or unconsciously, without collaborating with the system or opposing it. It is irrelevant whether the architect accepts this fact or not.

"We understand that we are responsible for building and must decide if we want to be collaborators or not. We understand that it is not the ambitious words of human desires which make our architecture good, but the action we take. We recognise that we are first degree hypocrites, in disguising with humanistic phrases things we do which are used for evil purposes. We understand that the world will not be bettered by a 'correct architecture' but that architecture depends on what is socially possible.

"We will not work for a privileged class. We will not work for a merely bureaucratic apparatus which has abandoned its purpose of serving the people. We shall build for a society by building a new society first. We must make it possible through education for men to be concerned about their own situation, to understand and to be able to change the world by themselves.

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"We shall try to be architects who will be asked to realise the new ideas and requirements of a society in which all people want to live. We are aware of the present situation of the world; of the necessity for a radical change in its structure; of our responsibility to participate in the change; and that any partial reform not only assumes acceptance of the existing social structures, but helps to perpetuate them.

"Thus, we propose to transform a congress of students of architecture in which: first, its programme of work disguised the real problems with an ambiguous and partial statement; second, its activities showed a lack of consciousness of these problems, and exhibited a merely festive tone.

"We proposed to change this congress to a discussion meeting, dealing with the social problems of the participating countries and facing our global responsibilities. We believe that we must create the necessary political, economic and social basis for development of our activities. We cannot collaborate with a society which is unconscious of its responsibilities. We therefore leave this international congress of architecture students and the IUEA."

This manifesto represented the views of about fifty architecture students who walked out of the congress to discuss in a way they were unable to do in the official programme. The statement is significant because it marks a new stage in the consciousness of students. In the past those students with a liberal conscience or an interest in politics studied subjects like sociology and politics in universities. They have usually made up the vanguard and often the sum total of revolutionary activity on the campus. Who, for instance, has heard of engineering and medical students being first to the barricades? But students in other disciplines are now beginning to discover the social significance of their actions.

\* \* \*

Architecture has been recognised by some as a social science, but it still remains a professional activity . . . a respectable occupation for a privileged middle class. Its laborious indoctrination rites (called education) lasting five years, usually make little attempt to give students an understanding of how society works. The profession has also been painfully liberal in encouraging student representation and taking the sting out of any possible discontent. Architecture is practised by people who become willing slaves of anyone or any organisation in a position to commission a building.

The students in Vienna were excited to find that most of their comrades who had turned up from other countries were equally disgusted with their society of bureaucratic capitalism and the inadequacy

of their education. It became necessary to decide how, as a specialist, one could understand the implications of one's work, who one was working for, and how the situation could be changed. It was necessary to realise how the abundant liberal and utopian intentions of most architects were destroyed or rendered meaningless by the type of society we live in.

Architecture students have always made a pretence of concern for social problems, but the architect suffers from a terrible arrogance which makes him approach every situation in a deterministic way imposing some dubious concept on a situation he doesn't properly understand. He rarely understands the danger of his being in a position of making assumptions and decisions about other people's lives instead of allowing others to find their own self-expression.

One recent example of liberal concern that was hardly thought worth considering in Vienna was the student worship of the American genius Buckminster Fuller. "Bucky", with his tensegrity structures and his famous geodesic domes, is certainly one of the greatest innovators in this century of technological innovation, but he comes rather unstuck in his attempts to solve the "problems of the world". His World Design Science Decade programme is based on the realisation that humanity has enough resources and technology to go round everyone without poverty and starvation. (This is stated as though no one had realised it before.) It also recognises that politicians are crooks who have prevented with their power-mania a proper distribution taking place. Bucky's programme is one of many international attempts of enlightened technocrats to solve things. But none are prepared to identify themselves with the indignation and despair of people trying to free themselves from the present system. Bucky says that he is transcendental to politics without realising that one can never escape from the politics of experience, of living together; and no technological solution, if it ignores this, can be useful to humanity. Students involved in WDSD are few.

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The other "trendy" challenge to the dismal conformity of architectural training (apart from the usual prima donna "Sydney Opera House" designers) is from those who advocate buildings with built-in obsolescence to be marketed in a commercial way like motor cars. This more disturbing and recent trend was also rejected by the Vienna students. Its exponents, like Arthur Quarmby, seem to advocate the disappearance of the architect who is replaced by the designer in the commercial firm churning out houses in factories. The idea is pointed

For an account of Buckminster Fuller's ideas read "Bucky Fuller in Paris" by Ray Gosling in ANARCHY 57.



out most clearly in Vance Packard's "prediction of doom" book, *The Waste Makers*:

"Home builders began talking excitedly about the house of tomorrow which will come in sections and all or part of the house can be traded in for a new model. The kitchen of tomorrow is to be bought as a unit with annual model changes available for the discontented. Appliance companies were reported considering building entire prefabricated walls and even rooms with their appliances built in. The whole wall could be traded in. *Business Week* reported that home owners would be encouraged to trade in a room just as they now trade in their car on a new model. And it added that there would be a national brand advertising to see that they do."

The idea that any really liberating innovation could come from this unashamedly commercial intent is ludicrous. Nor could a system like this be relied on to ensure high standards. People would just be conditioned to accept whatever low standards they were offered. There would be no attempt to educate people how to make proper use of what the advertisers would claim to be the new freedom of expression in the environment.

The interest of many students in this kind of proposal is disturbing because it is based on a need recognised by many today. This is the need of the individual to find more personal expression in an increasingly uniform and conformist society. This need is found with particular urgency in the design of inhuman mass housing estates, where, for example, precast egg-boxes are provided with only six points at which it is possible to knock nails in the wall. This is a by-product of the attitude which says that working people are lucky to get somewhere to live. It also gives architects a chance to follow in the footsteps of Corbusier and build towers in parks (some even remember the parks bit), to produce criminally high densities, while they themselves live in low-density suburban splendour.

Many architects are trying to cope with the problem of the individual, but surely it is stupid to pretend that with our individual imagination, we can cope with the problems of many people we will never meet or understand. That is one of the things we discovered at the Vienna discussions. Great concepts like Oscar Niemeyer's socialist utopia, Brasilia, don't cope with the problems of the people that socialism is presumably concerned with. They live (probably much more happily) away from the architectural superblocks, in shanty towns on the outskirts of the city. Theorists like Amos Rapoport suggest the idea of "loose fit" and Christopher Alexander suggests "thick wall pattern", but none of these can permit true individual expression in a social system that does not permit such a thing. We decided in Vienna that as architects alone we cannot change this.

It is pointless for us to design buildings with partitions that can be moved, to permit freedom of expression, when our whole educational development is one that teaches us that we cannot control our environment. Most people would never dream of affecting the built environment, or of planting trees themselves in the barren piece of "keep off" grass outside their house. Not till kids in school can tear their building to bits every term and re-erect it to their own design, can we see people really expressing themselves in their building.

The idea of personal expression is important, because here is the beauty of life. The most tragic loss of this faculty can be seen in African countries where villages and individual dwellings were once expressive of the community structure and decorated by the inhabitants. Now the people are being forced to live in monotonous rows of tin shacks.

One of the best critics of mass housing projects is N. J. Habraken, a Dutch professor in an architectural research establishment. He says for instance that, "The town planner discovers that he can design an ideal town but that it cannot be built because the realisation of the plans is laid in the hands of countless other people over whom he has not, and may not have, any say." Unfortunately too many town

They have gone to colleges in the mid-1960s, which were decorated with Captain Marvel and Superman and enormous blow-ups of spaceships. They now write the prevalent architectural criticism in England, in an amazing mixture of arid technical jargon and hip culture language, which would have provided an object lesson for George Orwell. A pastiche, not a parody, of this style would read like this:

Parametric shifts in technological possibilities, released as fallout from defence-oriented goals, create forms appropriate to spageage desires and raise potentialities for hallucogenic light and sound cultures which ultimately blow the mind.

If anyone thinks this is a joke, he should start reading the architectural magazines to find out what's in store for him. This new generation are devoted to preparing megastructures. Megastructures are difficult to describe, they have to be seen, but basically they are like everything in Montreal's Expo 67 rolled into one and built about a mile high. They are auto-destructive (important word, that) and auto-renewing, through the agency of giant machines which perpetually roll up and down within them, ultimately controlled by giant computers. All this is being stored up for the unsuspecting future council tenants of places like Walsall in 1980. Their designers, of course, will still be in the few remaining Victorian bits of London.

PETER HALL

(*New Society*, 24 October, 1968)



planners today, are able to realise their ridiculous concepts of ideal towns, but Habraken goes on to point out that in the "housing project" we can see the outlines of a process which reflects "the elimination of man as an individual. . . . The inhabitants of a development project cannot make their town their own. They remain guests in an environment which is not part of themselves". He shows how, in a rush to create new slum barracks to replace old ones, humanity is forgotten (though the capitalists benefit quite well on the way). He explains how our present approach to urban renewal does not allow first the freedom to combine (groups are moved in statistical units around the country), secondly, the renewal of the dweller's environment, and thirdly, the time for a community to form and flourish.

Habraken does, in his suggestions of alternatives, point the way for some permanent "support structure" which contains the services and permanence of a street, but also allows us to build up instead of sprawling in Los Angeles fashion. Anyone can then come along and build on this support structure in any way they please. He is still stuck with the idea that the local authority will provide the structure while commercial interests will provide the components for the dwelling, but so is anybody in a capitalist society, and it is hard to see Habraken's ideas really being worked out without a lot of other social problems being worked out as well.

\* \* \*

As students of architecture, being aware of all this, we saw our role as a difficult one. We could use our knowledge of the built environment to pinpoint some of the things wrong with present society and we could show how, as specialists, we are completely subordinate to this. The architect who designed Centre Point—the long-empty office block in central London, probably regards it as a fine piece of design, but how can we see it as an expression of anything more than surplus capitalism, one of the follies of a country that cannot let its people house themselves but can commission architects to design useless and superfluous office blocks.

As a person concerned with a special field, it is possible, when one stops pretending that one is solving the problems of society, to identify the barriers that prevent one from doing it. For example, someone making decisions in one place is usually completely alienated from the people he is making them for. He is separated by ridiculous professional barriers from colleagues in other parts of the building industry, and he can easily pass the buck for decisions to the politicians, who can pass it back to him or to someone else. There has to come a point when someone takes a stand. We live in a society where no one takes responsibility for its collective decisions, or are completely detached from real problems, e.g. Salford will have its future environment planned and designed by architects and planners in Georgian Edinburgh.

First of all, specialists must get closer to the people they are working for. Really human buildings can only come from the expression of need by a group of people who feel some sense of identity. They need someone with skills who can give expression to this need. But at present architects only give expression to their own self-centred needs, watered down by economists and building firms who can only see money, not people. They identify with their professional role instead of with the people they are serving. It is no good the architect saying that if he had the power he could set all to rights: he cannot. Only people themselves with control over their own lives can set things aright. The architect must recognise the responsibility that he carries at present, but he must also recognise his compliance in a system which makes a mockery of his utopias and other people's freedom.

With this realisation it becomes very difficult to know how one can keep alive. Designing buildings could be a self-destructing experience when one disagrees with the basis of how it is done. But within the present system *some* effort could be made. Architects are in a position to get all the people together who will live in a particular housing scheme, and get his ideas from their needs instead of from ministry circulars and from useless statistical reports from sociologists. Instead of arguing in his office about whether people prefer a kitchen/dining room to a sitting/dining room, he should give people the chance to decide themselves. But this won't be enough. He must also work for a society where he is not put in a position halfway between uncompromising bureaucracy and people wanting to be free humans.

\* \* \*

As students we saw our main role as that of changing education so that students in the future would have more of a chance. At present architectural education seems little more than a process that produces people who are sufficiently arrogant to think that they can take decisions affecting many other people without consulting them. It teaches students that most people are moronic about the environment and that they and the profession are the guardians of good taste in an evil world of competition and philistinism. The architectural profession in fact is very unsure of what the architect does. Students are told categorically that they are being trained to be "generalists" which means that in their course they are not allowed to study anything in depth. This term must seem to many students to mean parasitical middle men because one's responsibility to society, though stated, is never investigated. It is an education that fails to begin with a critical look at the status quo, and goes on to prevent individuals following up the problems

For an account of Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH) and its work in the Mississippi Delta see "Strike City, Mississippi" by Peter Brown in ANARCHY 72.



and situations that interest them. They are told that they must do the course and must be kept to it by teachers who have a responsibility to society—after all, one's buildings might fall down if one didn't win one's tutor's approval! Not only is there no freedom in the training of people interested in the built environment, the disciplinary barriers are impenetrable. If these barriers in education were to vanish, the architect as benevolent dictator would vanish too.

Instead students could arm themselves with useful tools and knowledge with which they could assist a community. They would no longer need to be part of a profession imposing its esoteric rationale on a society which has no choice but to submit to a meaningless environment, an environment which expresses the drab, exploited, meaningless lives of so many people.

I would invite any architect or architecture student reading this sympathetically, to get in touch with me. We don't want to set up any sort of national institution to fight all the evil forces in society. Our actions have to be in the area we live and work in, but we need to come together to share experiences and common interests.

"I wish the profession would dissolve itself."

IAN NAIRN (BBCtv 12 February, 1969)

## What hope for popular initiative in planning?

THE NEW TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT, among other things, imposes an obligation on local authorities to give "adequate publicity" to the preparation of development plans, and last summer the Minister of Housing and Local Government set up a Committee on Public Participation in Planning with Mr. Arthur Skeffington in the chair.

Harford Thomas, himself a member of the Skeffington Committee, remarked in the *Guardian* that there is a risk that "participation will come to be seen as mere political bluff, not quite a confidence trick perhaps but a handy all-purpose sedative to stop the citizenry from beating the police over the head with their banner poles", and he went on that "it is becoming clear that the conventional structure of local government is not adequate as it is to accommodate participation. Indeed that is precisely the reason why amenity groups and community groups have been springing up spontaneously all over the country . . . but something more will be needed, possibly some sort of collective community committee or community forum in which many groups can come together."

To which Robin Guthrie replied "What if the people to be affected are not accustomed to working on committees? What if such committees succeed only in excluding the less vocal majority from participating in their own future? In what setting will the 'community forum' operate and who will organise it? The people who are suffering most and are heard least in the planning process are those in large-scale inner urban re-development areas. The key to their problem is to establish continuous contact between them and the planning authority based on existing forms of communication through the launderette, the pub and the corner shop. . . ."

Amplifying his comment, Ernest Wistrich declared that "it may



well be that local government will have to undertake an entirely new technique of consulting the public on the whole range of their activities including social services, planning, education and leisure. The solution might lie in the employment of community development workers whose main task would be to build up contact with the community at grass roots and encourage active involvement of the public at neighbourhood level."

But the community development worker employed by, or under the auspices of the local authority, has an impossible task. Sooner or later, as a vast amount of experience in the United States shows, he has to take sides with his "clients" against his employers. And then what happens?

Anne Lapping, discussing this point in an article on Social Action in *New Society* (2nd January, 1969), remarks that "The Seeborn committee on local authority social services rather skirted round this problem in its section on community development, which it defined as 'assisting local groups to clarify and express their needs and objectives and to take collective action to attempt to meet them'. The committee quoted the Council for Training in Social Work which suggested that if a local authority is going to indulge in community development it will 'need to recognise the fact that some of its staff may be involved in situations which lead to criticism of their services'. Judging from similar conflicts that have already arisen—as when Tower Hamlets, for example, closed down a family advice centre in Wapping—this problem demands more than mere recognition."

Better admit from the start that unofficial action, with its lack of funds, its lack of contacts and status, and lack of full-time workers, is in the long run more genuine and more likely to be effective. A new organisation was started in January, Community Action Union (16 Westbourne Park Road, London, W.2), declaring that

"We believe that the poor, the inarticulate, the deprived in our cities are the only people who can really solve their problems. That a community *can* rise up against its environment and constructively combat the systems which seek to depress it, has been proved by community workers operating now in British cities."

The reference is presumably to the work associated with George Clark in Notting Hill, with Ray Gosling in St. Ann's, Nottingham, with the Wandsworth Community Workshop, and similar unofficial action groups. The claim is bold, but we don't know a better way.

Read "Direct Action and the Urban Environment" by Robert Swann in ANARCHY 41, and "City Planning—Professionals and Protesters" by David Gurin in ANARCHY 83.

## Popular initiative in housing

IN AN EARLIER ISSUE of ANARCHY (No. 35) we published an article on self-help housing in Latin America deriving from the accounts of experience in Peru and other countries by John Turner, Margaret Grenfell and William Mangin from the August 1963 issue of the journal *Architectural Design* on Architecture-without-Architects. Describing his experience in the *barriadas* of Lima, John Turner described these squatter settlements as "the unaided self-help solution: a demonstration of the common people's initiative and the potential of their resources".

*Architectural Design* returns to this subject in its August 1968 issue called Architecture of Democracy (still available at the time of writing if you send 10s. or \$1.20, to 26 Bloomsbury Way, London, W.C.1). The editors of this special issue remark that in their previous study of squatter settlements in the developing countries they found "contrary to much popular opinion, that these serve a very positive function for their residents" and they ask "what lessons can we draw from this which are relevant to the very different situation in which architects work in the developed nations?"

"As we tried to answer the question set by the editors, we began with a shared perception that there are many positive aspects of the squatter environment, especially in the flexibility of the solution and

Who are the more numerous, the people in whose interest it is to bring about major changes in order to arrive at a world fit for all, or the people who think that it is in their interest to maintain the status quo? If we succeed in interpreting and expressing the deepest needs of thousands, millions, and billions of human beings and help them to gain precise knowledge of themselves and their problems, to start constructive action of every kind, from the lowest to the highest level, and to make their weight count, we shall have succeeded in setting in motion a practical revolutionary force.

DANILO DOLCI



its adaptability to the changing needs of families over time, and in the sense of autonomy and self-determination for both individuals and communities in making their own environment directly. In contrast, the world which we saw around us in the United States, with all its relative economic lavishness and technical virtuosity, often seemed outside the control of its inhabitants, even alien to men. It began to seem to us that there was here an underlying and more basic theme: the necessity of making the dwelling environment a human world. We found that we shared a sense that what makes an environment right for man is more than either its aesthetic qualities or its technical appropriateness, or even a combination of the two; that it is important also that an environment respond to us, that we have been able to make it ours. In this view, the means of making and controlling are tied together in experience with their physical product, and aesthetic judgements are and must be penetrated by human meanings and relevances. As a friend wrote to one of us, the point of view is *that the world of art and the world of society are not separate, that there is only one world in which we all live and in which all our activities take place . . . our sense of any single activity can only be made rational by our sense of the whole.* This requires us to look at the city, its neighbourhoods and its dwellings, as not simply artifacts and/or as the format of human activity, but as the vehicle and expression of our human life which, being human, is also communal, in the Greek sense, political."

John Turner, in his further study of the squatters of Lima, declares that, "The squatter *barriada*-builder who chooses to invest his life's savings in an environment that he creates, forms himself in the process. The person, as the member of a family and of a local community, finds in the responsibilities and activities of home-building and local improvement the creative dialogue essential for self-discovery and growth. The *barriada* is ground for living that the housing units, marketed or allocated by mass-consumption society, do not provide."

He contrasts the situation of the poor with their lot in more developed countries: "The cities of the incipiently industrializing or transitional world, such as Lima, respond far more readily to the demands of the poor majority, than cities of the industrial or post-industrial world, like Chicago or New York, respond to their poor minorities. Because the poor are the majority in Lima and because the government controls neither the material nor the human resources necessary for the satisfaction of essential housing needs, the poor must act for themselves—and if the official rules and regulations get in their way these, along with any policemen who may be sent in to enforce them, are generally swept aside. Consequently, the very poor are able to find some corner for their private life, even if it's only a temporary shack in one of the interstices of the city—on an unguarded lot, in a ravine or even under a bridge. And the somewhat less poor are able to choose between renting one or two

tenement rooms and squatting on the periphery. The urban poor in wealthy and highly institutionalized mass-consumption society do not have these freedoms. At best, like the Algerian and Portuguese immigrants to Paris, they are able to set up very poor *bidonvilles* on the edge of the city; more commonly, like the ghetto inhabitants of the United States cities, the poor can only rent tenements, from slumlords or from public housing authorities. There they must stay until they can make the far higher grade of suburbia in one leap—unless, of course, they are an ethnically discriminated minority in which case their environment will hold them down for ever, or until they burn it down.

"The man who would be free must build his own life. The existential value of the *barriada* is the product of three freedoms: the freedom of community self-selection; the freedom to budget one's own resources and the freedom to shape one's own environment."

And he goes on to develop these three aspects, concluding, "That the mass of the urban poor in cities like Lima are able to seek and find improvement through home-ownership (or *de facto* possession) when they are still very poor by modern standards is certainly the main reason for their optimism. If they were trapped in the inner cities, like so many of the North American poor, they too would be burning instead of building. The mass-designed, mass-produced environments for an increasingly homogenized market of mass-consumers are no more than assemblies of material goods devoid of existential meaning. They are not the product of dialogue. Decisions are made for a producer's market by those themselves bound by highly institutionalized norms and procedures. The occupant buys or rents a ready-made unit in much the same way as he gets his motor car or TV set—and if it is a flat or in a tightly controlled subdivision, he can do little more with his house than he can with the other manufactured 'goods' essential to his way of life. The intense dialogue that takes place between squatters planning an invasion, and the continuing dialogue of its development and administration are, with rare exceptions, totally lacking in the modern housing process."

Other contributors develop Turner's theme in its application to the cities of the United States. What about its applications in Britain?

A man must believe that the world is a world for him; if he exercises initiative and takes a step, his action will have an effect, however small, in the same real world. . . . A man has faith that if he is well-intentioned, rational, not fanatical, he is not alone; there is a human community that is thinking the same thoughts as himself and his friends and ready to act in concert.

PAUL GOODMAN



# The London squatters' case

JIM RADFORD

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS of writing about current issues in a monthly magazine, is the difficulty in estimating to what extent one's words may be overtaken by events before they appear. At the moment the London Squatters' campaign is in its early stages. Our demonstrations have attracted national attention. Our example has already been followed in Notting Hill. There will be at least one more occupation before this issue of *HELP* is published, and we are seriously thinking about the *Crunch*: an attempt to establish a homeless family in an empty property—*permanently*. By the time you read this we may have failed to fulfil our promise, or we could all be in jail—I just don't know.

What I do know is that, when you read this, more than 15,000 people will still be homeless: more than 1,800,000 people will still be existing in accommodation officially classified as unfit for human occupation and millions more will still be suffering the frustration, ill health, marital break up and despair created by slum conditions, damp and overcrowding. This is something I know about and care about, and since I am involved in the Squatters' campaign, I want to tell you what it is we are trying to do, and why we believe it to be necessary.

It is now more than six years since the demonstrations and protests against the atrocious conditions at Newington Lodge Hostel, which exposed the LCC's policy towards the homeless. It is more than three years since we initiated direct action against the Kent County Council

*JIM RADFORD's account of the London Squatters' campaign is reproduced, with grateful acknowledgements, from the current issue of the magazine HELP (by subscription only, £3 3s. a year from Community Publications, 2 Arundel Street, W.C.2), in which he writes a regular monthly column. As he predicts events have moved further since his account was written. On February 9 and 11, squatters occupied empty houses in Cleveland Road and Oaklands Road, Ilford, and are still there as we go to press. On February 11 injunctions were served on several supporters of the London Squatters by the Borough Council. For the latest information see FREEDOM.*

in a campaign that successfully ended the systematic destruction of families at King Hill Hostel, and brought the growing problem of homelessness to everyone's breakfast table. I do not think it is taking too much for granted to say that it was the publicity surrounding this campaign which created the climate in which the BBC felt able to show "Cathy Come Home", a film they had been sitting on for two years.

We all know the tremendous impact that "Cathy" had. It led to the formation of Shelter, an organisation that has the support of all sections of the community, that has raised substantial sums of money and that does an enormous amount of work to alleviate the misery caused by homelessness and inadequate housing.

But in spite of this growth of concern, in spite of increased understanding of the human suffering involved, in spite of widespread recognition of the fact that those affected are not the feckless ne'er-do-wells that some self-satisfied haves would like to believe, but in the main, innocent victims of a social and economic system over which they have no control; in spite of all this—the problem is getting worse.

There are 1,000 more people in homeless hostels this year than there were last year. In London alone there were 1,500 *more* people in Part III (temporary) accommodation in 1967, than there were in 1966; and despite the real efforts of some local authorities the number of children being taken into care because of homelessness and bad housing conditions remains fairly constant. More than 5,000 children are separated from their parents and more than three million families continue to live in slums, near slums or overcrowded rooms, at a time when many authorities are being forced to cut back their housing programmes.

Is it all necessary? Is the problem insoluble? Look around you. In London and most other cities there are empty buildings by the score; large private houses purchased by speculators who may pull them down in a year or two to build on the site; whole streets compulsorily purchased for road widening schemes that are often postponed for years; church and railway properties disintegrating through vandalism and neglect; and glaringly obvious, large blocks of offices and luxury flats completed years ago—but still unoccupied because those who

A history of the 1946 squatters' movement is published in ANARCHY 23, and is reprinted in the London Squatters' Broad-sheet, 6d. or 5s. a dozen from London Squatters' Campaign, ANARCHY 23, and is reprinted from London Squatters' Campaign, 128 Hainault Road, Leytonstone, London, E.11, or from Freedom Press.



need accommodation most cannot afford the high rents. Everyone who works in central London is familiar with some of these.

There are those in our society who will justify the moral and legal standards that condemn whole families, including small children, to live in rat-infested basements, or to eat, sleep and copulate in one small room, while this accommodation stands empty. There are many more comfortably housed, who simply accept the situation without thought.

The individuals and groups who have joined to form the London Squatters regard this state of affairs as intolerable. We are actively encouraging and assisting homeless families, and those living in degrading conditions, who want to move into these empty buildings. On December 1st we invaded the Hollies, a luxury block in East London, where many of the flats have remained empty since the building was completed four years ago. This was a token demonstration for the purpose of drawing public attention to a major social evil. On December 21st we went a step further. Together with a number of homeless families we took over the Old Vicarage in Capworth Street, E.11, a substantial twenty-four roomed house that has been empty ever since the vicar moved into a newly-built house nearby three years ago. In spite of attempts to evict us and the arrest of four people including myself, the building was barricaded and held for twenty-four hours, as we had previously announced. On the next occasion we hope that the lessons of 1946, when mushrooming squatter groups and massive public support compelled the authorities to accept the situation, will begin to be repeated. It may be that future occupations will be equally short-lived in spite of our intentions. Obviously we will not be popular with wealthy property owners, but if the idea spreads, it could unleash a determination and a movement that could bring about the drastic re-appraisal of values we so badly need.

There will be many objections. We have been told how wrong it would be to involve children in such a situation. It is an objection one might listen to more carefully if it came from someone who had been doing something about the thousands of children in slums, hostels and institutions who suffer unseen.

No doubt there will be many, including some readers of *HELP*, who sympathise with the squatters' motives but who will still feel unable to support or condone breaking the law. To them one can only point out that little more than 100 years ago, the law enabled mill owners to employ and exploit seven-year-old children. There are contradictions that must be resolved and evils that should be opposed, no matter what the lawyers say.

This is not a case of confrontation for its own sake, it is an issue

where every reasonable conventional and legal solution has been attempted. A great many people and organisations have done and are doing, everything they possibly can within the law. But clearly it is not enough. If anyone has a better idea that would avoid the need for illegal action, please write and tell me. But if you want to help the squatters, volunteers are needed to assist in various ways, many of them orthodox, leafletting, picketing, research, etc., and money is also needed to print leaflets and posters.

The London Squatters' Group may flounder without achieving anything. The forces we are opposing may be too powerful to resist. But as one who believes that people come before profits—I hope not.

That it is possible in Britain today to be literally homeless, and that thousands of families are as destitute and blameless as though an earthquake had hit them, is the plain truth . . . many thousands of displaced families are playing a ghastly game of musical chairs, looking not only for new houses but for hovels which cannot be dignified with the name of home.

There is large-scale human agony among the casualties of the system, with whom the statutory bodies are not equipped to cope. Families without legal recourse, or without a father, or without savings, or without timely knowledge of how to act, find themselves homeless and drop piecemeal through the system, sticking for a brief, heartless time in some crowded council home-for-the-homeless, before the parents are possibly separated for ever and the children taken into care—at a cost to the state far greater than the rents that might have paid for them. Again, it must be emphasised that in general these are not feckless, irresponsible people: they are simply victims of the housing shortage. They need a short-term rescue operation which neither central nor local government can supply.

—*The Times*, November 1968



# Against the system

**BRIAN RICHARDSON**

THE AIM OF SYSTEM BUILDING, as I understand it, is to increase productivity in the building industry.

The theory is that time is to be saved in the design process by using standard details, planning a building to a series of "preferred dimensions" which limits its size and proportion to those which are permitted by a range of standard components. Time is to be saved on the site by using industrial methods in place of the traditional trades. Components will be produced on mass-production lines in factories and site work will be reduced to assembly. Money is to be saved by the building owners, who will join together in consortia to programme large amounts of work, modify their needs so that they can be satisfied with standard components and obtain economies by bulk buying.

This seems attractive, and even obvious in an industrial society. Certainly it is all the rage now in England, with the bright boys in the Department of Education and the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works exhorting the local authorities to form into consortia with paramilitary names like NENK, CLASP, SCOLA, SEAC, etc. A number of schools, and significantly enough, barracks have been produced in "system".

But I find myself, like Abu's CND sheep, struggling in the opposite direction to the rest of the flock and away, as I see it, from the abyss.

It is easy to understand the popularity of system building. There is a real need for new buildings in quantity, and much of the old practice in the industry is absurdly inefficient. There is a shortage

*BRIAN RICHARDSON is an architect who has written on the problems of the homeless in several issues of ANARCHY.*

of tradesmen—the needs of the community cannot easily be met with the present labour force.

The lack of co-ordination and the disunity in the approach of architects has led to much visual confusion and many ugly works as well as a few masterpieces. System building is claimed to be the answer: standards of performance can be laid down and mediocre designers will be able to turn out buildings which because of the discipline involved in system work will avoid the worst pitfalls.

What then are my misgivings?

Well, like that other popular and apparently commonsense idea, the policy of defending a country by threatening any attacker with nuclear devastation, it is questionable on two levels:

(1) Is it capable of doing what is claimed? (2) If it can do it, is it even then a good thing?

You know what I think about the bomb; (1) it is a very chancy way of keeping the peace, to say the best of it, and not really a practical proposition, but (2) if a case could be made out for it working, we would all then have to get to love it and live by it, and this would be to build atrocity into the scheme of things.

Architecture is only a part of life, but still worth caring about to some of us, and I see system building as a threat to architecture.

(1) Can it do what is claimed for it? It is perhaps early to make a judgement, but I am deeply sceptical. Many of the advantages are illusory. The local authority I work for is not, so far, finding that it saves time at the design stage because job architects have to augment standard drawings where they are not able to accept the crudity of the standard solution. Then there are the instances where special bodging pieces have to be designed to make standard bits suit special cases.

The office administration required to operate system building is hierarchical—military even—in character. The job architect is not to reason why. If he is given freedom and responsibility he will upset the working of the system which depends on policy decisions made at high level for bulk purchasing arrangements, etc. The duties of the lower orders are restricted to the carrying out of routine tasks in applying standard details. All this was exposed in ANARCHY 31 as being the inefficient, hidebound, clogged-up method of organisation.

Building costs don't seem to go down. The savings won by bulk buying are dissipated in high administrative costs. This has led at least one County Architect to abandon the "system" approach after



having given it a reasonable trial. Even with old-fashioned site organisation, nothing has been found much cheaper than hand-laid brick-work and site-made concrete.

As for time saved on site; this claim does seem to be substantiated in practice. But it is curious that improved site organisation on normal building sites can bring down time dramatically too. It seems that a fresh look at the building operation such as one gets from "critical path" planning is enough to cut down time wastage, and it is this fresh look rather than the system of design and construction itself that has led to the good results obtained so far.

(2) But even supposing that all these points can be attended to, would system building then be a good thing for the community? My main reason for thinking not is that it leads to sterility of design. The more the system is opened up in the direction of allowing the architect to produce an infinity of arrangements from a free choice of materials and components, the less does it become a system.

It works by limitation and restriction; economies can then be gained by ruthless application of long runs of production and architecture goes out of the window. The system-pushers say that it still takes a good architect to produce a good building on the system, but no good architect is going to suppress for long his creative impulses, and he cannot sustain the struggle of trying to do something with the standard details indefinitely. He is going to leave, and let the obedient ones get on with it. This isn't just a grouse for architects (unless we are the only section of the community that is concerned about the quality of the environment). As these buildings are churned out without joy or pride for their creators, they are going to provide inadequate service to their occupiers. A Minister has already said that we need have no fear that the new methods will lead to monotony, and he wouldn't have needed to say it if it wasn't obvious that that is what is happening.

If architecture is going to thrive, designers must have the opportunity to develop new ideas. With an established system all innovations are looked at with hostility and original work is impossible. I don't think the public will get good value for money from this approach. The organisation for administering system building becomes more and more centralised, and all the eggs will go into ever bigger and fewer baskets. Strong vested interests will emerge and the small local firm with low overheads will no longer be able to make a contribution. The big concerns with high finance behind them will prosper; more riches will flow to the rich.

This process of centralisation is already being urged by the government, and the pressure is being made effective by financial sanction: funds only forthcoming to local authorities which toe the

line. The National Building Agency, formed ostensibly to co-ordinate the smaller authorities, is ideal for this purpose.

As government control is increased, there is a corresponding decrease in the possibility of workers' control in the industry. Even such opportunity as is at present open to the building craftsman to bring his expert knowledge and skill to the job and get some satisfaction from doing it well, will be further eroded. As more and more components are made off site at factories and by mechanical processes where the work people have of course no control over the end product, and might even be unaware of what they are making.

The situation facing the industry is critical in that there is a real and increasing shortage of new houses, schools, universities and hospitals. That this is so is not so much because of inefficiency in the industry as that governmental and financial priorities have been wrong. Not only has not enough been spent on building for many years, due perhaps to war and war preparation, but what spending there has been has fluctuated wildly. We have had the infamous stop-go method of budget control, and this has made it very difficult to build at a sensible price. It has also slowed down the natural development of modern techniques which would have made the crude "crash-programme" approach of system building unnecessary.

We must recognise that system building is not a panacea that will put things right again with no corresponding loss. Rather it would be better to improve the training of architects on the lines advocated by Paul Ritter, increase the responsibility of job architects and improve office organisation as outlined in the RIBA study, *The Architect and His Office*, rationalise the financing of a building as called for by J. Lewis Womersley in his paper to the RIBA called "Productivity for What?" (in which he drew attention to the small proportion of the total cost accounted for by the building in relation to interest charges, etc.) and introduce workers' control into the building industry.



## ... and a postscript on Ronan Point

BRIAN RICHARDSON'S article was written before the partial collapse of a 25-storey system-built point block, Ronan Point, in East London. The inquiry following this disaster (*Collapse of Flats at Ronan Point, Canning Town*. Inquiry Report, HMSO, 9s. 6d.) criticises many of the organisations for building research and development: the National Building Agency ("a serious weakness in thinking"), the Building Research Station ("no steps taken to give warning of progressive collapse"), the Building Regulations Advisory Committee ("no record that . . . progressive collapse has ever been considered"), the British Standards Institution ("arrangements are not satisfactory"), the Ministry of Housing ("no further thought was required") and the architectural and structural engineering professions ("found wanting").

Richardson's criticism of the National Building Agency has been echoed by many since the disaster. Terence Bendixson pointed out in the *Guardian* that it "spent a large part of its early days persuading local authorities to place orders for systems in order to get them launched on the market. The agency also exerted pressure on councils to form consortia. . . ." And the architect Walter Segal remarked that "The culprits are the local authorities, particularly the GLC and the National Building Agency. I think the NBA is especially responsible for this package deal."

Nicholas Taylor, in the *Sunday Times* commented that the whole history of the point block "would be read by posterity like the history of the atom bomb, as a parable of the dangerous fascination of technique for technique's sake" and he goes on, "So many systems were released on the market simultaneously (1963 was the boom year) that there has been frantic competition in the trade to obtain the large contracts essential for survival. There have been free, first-class air trips and lavish parties, let alone the glossiest of brochures, through which councillors and their technical officers have been systematically seduced. . . . The cost of these off-the-peg virility symbols has been colossal. So what has the Government done? As so often, it has been caught between its technocratic head and its economic heart. . . ."

Tower blocks, as he and many others point out, "cost anything from 20 to 80 per cent more than normal terrace houses of brick".

The subsidy system was actually adjusted so that the higher the block the more the government paid per dwelling. Since then the Ministry of Housing has quietly changed the subsidy system to "reflect the now-admitted fact that it is cheaper to build lower". This, more than the opinions of tenants, or the misgivings voiced since the Ronan Point disaster, will put an end to the tower block boom. Meanwhile, as Nicholas Taylor remarks, "the leisure and living standards of most people are rising so quickly that the cramped flat high up in the concrete-walled tower is likely to be the major political embarrassment for the party in power in 20 years' time. Slum clearance of them will be all the more urgent—yet technically this will be highly complex, particularly if the Ronan Point decision is to stiffen them up. Will they still be with us centuries hence, these multi-storey municipal megaliths? Perhaps our descendants, as they gaze at such super-Stonehenges, will wonder what kind of Druidical worship the housing committee indulged in and whether they actually offered human sacrifice."

In a confused way, the new generation of designers have half grasped a whole collection of technical and economic and aesthetic propositions, including these:

1. The building cycle is decreasing, so that we can expect faster and faster renewal of all structures; land has a value, and planners should try to economise in its use.
2. Prefabrication can be expected to extend from the construction of schools and exhibition halls to a wide range of structures.
3. Conventional European cities are not the only sources of aesthetic excitement, and Los Angeles freeways may be a 20th century equivalent of the Piazza San Marco.

What they have utterly failed to do, as yet, is to fuse these propositions into a logical decision-making process, which allows often contradictory notions to be given a certain weight. Thus, fantastically, one can still find architectural students who defend building mile-high towers on the ground of "saving land", thus ignoring completely all the well publicised economic research on the subject of densities over the last decade. They have, as a Cambridge supervisor once put it to a contemporary of mine, a jackdaw-like propensity to pick up bright objects and think that this excuses them the need for thought.

PETER HALL

(*New Society*, 24 October, 1968)



# Technocracy: the enemy of architecture?

GEORGE MOLNAR

TECHNOCRACY MEANS THE MANAGEMENT of a country by technical experts. Theoretically, it is for the good of the whole community. In practice, the good of the whole community is a term which can be manipulated and may not be related to the good of the individuals which compose the community.

Statistics can always be used so as to make the population of one country feel that in some ways they are better off than their neighbours. It is up to the managers to choose the items by which the citizen can measure his happiness. There is always something which, if emphasised sufficiently, makes the country stand out. Industrial production in the USA, social security in Britain, meat-eating in Argentina, sport achievement in Australia, education in Switzerland, and so on. To be better off than somebody else does not mean that you are well off at all, but human nature being as it is, it gives you the same satisfaction.

To improve your standard is not just a private aim. In a technocratic society, it becomes your patriotic duty. To help production you have to consume as fast as you can. "Eat more apples", "drink more milk", "have your own swimming pool", "the choice for your second car". After the depression, economists agreed that all problems of the United States would be solved if every citizen learnt to be ten per cent better off each year.

*GEORGE MOLNAR who is Senior Lecturer in Architecture at the University of Sydney, gave this lecture to the Architectural Research Group, Adelaide, and we reprint it with acknowledgements to the journal Architecture in Australia. (He is not the same person as the Sydney libertarian George Molnar who has also contributed to ANARCHY.)*

It is strange to reflect that a Utopian country—where the climate and scenery are perfect, food grows by itself, disease is unknown, where everybody leads a happy and contented life—statistically would have no rating at all, and would be looked down on by any car-, TV-, refrigerator-, washing-machine-owning, 40-hours-a-week worker of the bleakest industrial town.

The real aim of technocracy is to achieve technical perfection. A dedicated scientist must always want to improve his design, better his products, perfect his invention. The process is never ending. From his point of view the question, "Why?" has no meaning. Everest was to be climbed because it was there. The summits of technology keep rising for ever. To what extent scaling those summits affects human happiness is not his concern. Yet the proper answer to the question, "Why?" must be phrased not from the technical, but from the human angle.

Cars are meant to take us from one place to the other quickly in comfort. Cars are getting bigger, better, faster. The roads are choked; traffic is at a standstill. The designer is still working on bigger, better, faster, cars. "Why?" The roads are no concern of the car designer. So more roads have to be built. The road engineer is after the easiest-moving traffic on the shortest possible route. Trees are cut down, historic buildings demolished. The very landscape which we used to enjoy while travelling disappears. "Why?" The landscape is no concern of the road engineer. Ultimately, the stream of new cars fills up the new roads again. We are back where we started.

Technocracy has no morals. The concept of morals arises from the human condition. Research on abstract facts is above such a thing. A television technician is interested only in producing better and better television sets. What is shown on the screen interests him only as far as the clarity of the reception goes. If more sets will be sold by appealing to the public's lowest taste and larger sales will produce greater funds for research, so be it. His aim is the better set.

Because of this striving for perfection, technocracy is not interested either in the most economical way of production or in the conservation of our natural resources. Yet we accept its lead more and more because we somehow have a notion that technocracy is efficient and economical. This idea is encouraged by people who like power and for whom technocracy provides the concentration of power they are after. If economy or efficiency determined the use of our resources, we would concentrate on bus instead of car design. A bus carrying 60 people costs, say, £4,000. The development of the car industry enables everybody to have a car. Sixty cars cost say fifteen times as much, plus the extra cost of petrol, maintenance, garages, parking places, roads, bridges, etc. The result of this extraordinary expenditure is the complete chaos that strangles our cities.



The public is assured again and again by planners and idealistic architects that once mass production of houses in factories is properly organised, houses will be produced cheaply and efficiently like motor cars. A great proportion of the population accepts this as gospel, and the opposition tends to concentrate only on the possible monotony of the design. Yet the cheapness of the mass production should also be queried.

Every production process from purely economic angles has its optimum size, which is specific to such production. Larger or smaller factories will make for less efficiency. Some years ago, the American financial magazine *Fortune*, conducted a survey to establish the optimum size of production unit for different industries. Among its findings was that the giant automobile factories are less economical than the medium-sized one.

The clothing industry provided a revealing fact. One of the great department stores was to put a new spring dress on the market. The fashion designer produced a design; a dress was made accordingly and the production manager, the factory manager, chief buyer, fashion manager, advertising manager, sales manager, distribution manager, public relations manager, research manager, motivations manager, publicity manager, efficiency manager got together. They thought the dress was good; decided that with the right publicity they would sell about 20,000. The production assured the management that in such quantities the dress can be sold profitably for forty-two dollars and fifty cents, which was all right. Nobody found it incongruous that the one and only model dress run up by a little dressmaker in the Bronx cost only thirty-five dollars. This shows that the most efficient production unit in certain industries can be very small.

After the war, the concern of every government was housing. I took part in a symposium in Melbourne, the aim of which was to foresee the future of architecture. Among the delegates were some distinguished architects who had just returned from abroad where they visited and studied every possible mass housing production method in the world. The Government was all set to go into the housing industry in a big way. Their findings were disappointing. There existed no mass-produced housing which could compete with traditional methods; the only economy achieved was through mass buying of material, which had its limitations. The most efficient production unit for housing seems to be a good builder with half a dozen tradesmen.

I attended, in London, the International Congress of Architects, the subject of which was "Industrialisation of Architecture". The summary of a week's discussion, as I saw it, was as follows: Conventional building methods are generally cheaper than new ways.

If a project is of sufficient size, it will have its own mass production, the economic limit of which seldom goes beyond the building itself. There is no existent method of mass-produced buildings or large building parts which will reduce cost. The only known prefabricated building method which can compete with conventional techniques is the one used for certain school projects in England, but economy is achieved there more through efficient design than from the technique of the construction itself. Yet—and this is most important—mass production and prefabrication is on the increase, and is inescapable, not because they produce cheaper or better buildings, but because they call for bigger production units and thus represent centralisation of power. This is the trend of technocracy. Theoretically, technical inventions could help decentralisation. But decentralisation means freedom and the possibility of contracting out. This is not the way research is directed.

Huxley, in his book *Science, Liberty and Peace*, maintained that if scientists and organisations had thought it worthwhile, by now we would have, instead of gigantic power stations, small individual units producing electricity cheaper than from the main. Instead, we now have atomic energy generating plants, which we have been assured recently do represent quite an economic approach if we think in terms of generating plants costing over £400,000,000. The problem is to find justification for such size units. Technocracy will.

Mass production must have uniformity not only in its products, but in people who use them. It is the technical process directed to turn out goods in large quantities which requires the sameness of such goods. Standardised products are acceptable only if everybody wants the same things. Mass production is based on standardised men. Technocracy is against freedom and individuality.

In a way, we are less free these days than in the time of the worst oppressions. There is a German song from the Middle Ages: *Die Gedanken sind frei* ("Thoughts are free. They move about like mighty shadows"). In a technocratic society, the citizen conditioned by mass communication, by newspapers, radio, TV, has no thought of his own, free or otherwise, and does not even know it.

Technocracy is an enemy of architecture. It is so because it creates a society in bondage, based on standardised human existence, with no aspiration beyond wealth. A restraint of freedom by itself is not necessarily against good architecture. Discipline is one of the great architectural virtues. But the spirit which causes such restraint must be of inspiring quality. Architecture is the expression of society itself. We are in for an architecture of megalomaniac dullness.



Some manifestations of technocracy in architecture are Gigantism, Structuralism, Functionalism, Obsolescence and lack of relationship to human scale or aspiration. Technocracy has no aesthetics. In art, being anti-humanistic promotes abstraction.

Scientific thinking is abstract. Abstraction means to disengage an arbitrary quality from the general reality of things. Abstraction properly used is a tool for an end, not a thing by itself. The end in art is a heightened awareness of living. All art must be humanistic.

Typical examples of Gigantism are our office buildings. Higher and higher they rise, dehumanising our cities, reducing us to robots, causing chaos, to the complete disregard of economy and efficiency. To start with, the design of modern office buildings is wasteful. Nearly fifty per cent of the total building is equipment. This may sound exaggerated but, if you bear in mind that the standard depth of office floors in the USA is 3 feet six inches, this already represents over twenty per cent of the total building, to which all the other mechanical installations and plant rooms have to be added.

Tall buildings, of course, are more expensive to build than medium-sized ones. Also, because of the proportionately greater floor area taken up by more lifts, larger ducts, columns, lobbies, more building has to be built to provide the same useful floor area. None of this matters. These are prestige buildings, representing wealth and power in the crudest way, by size. Cost is secondary. Yet labour and material spent unnecessarily on such offices increases the cost of houses and buildings where money matters very much.

Structuralism is the dominance of the structural design for its own sake, unrelated to the function of the building. Usually it is terribly expensive. The Berlin Festival Hall is a good example—it has a saddle roof, supported on two widely spaced points, instead of being carried on the walls enclosing the hall. "An unsuitable solution to a non-existent problem", was the uninformed criticism, but to the engineer the problem was a real one—a roof on two points—the building to be set under it mattered not in the least.

Gathered columns also come into this category. They are to unclutter the space under a building, to give unobstructed view. This, of course never happens. A column on an angle is longer than a vertical column. So there is more column under the building to obstruct the view. This is not the whole story. The cross-section of the columns also has to be greater because of the greater length and bending moment. The result is a space teeming with an overabundance of thick columns. The space for circulation is further reduced because of the headroom requirements under the trestles. And all this at about four times the cost of normal construction!

Functionalism can be observed in our sun control system. Once we had a wall to protect us from the elements, and a window to look out. The function of the wall was rephrased as being our visual integration with the outside world and the wall was made all glass, thus ceasing to insulate any more. Air-conditioning had to be introduced to make the place livable, but the cost was terrific. Thus we invented the louvres to protect the glass, which louvres deprive us of the integration with the outside world for the sake of which we dispensed with the insulating wall.

Obsolescence is another characteristic of technocracy. Progress is merciless. An American skyscraper is designed for a life of forty years only. It is not that in forty years' time the building will not function as well as it does today, but its equipment—lifts, air-conditioning, lighting and communication system—will be outdated. To have an office in such a building would reflect on any self-respecting firm.

Obsolescence also affects the design strongly. Beauty becomes secondary to novelty. The technological improvement must find an expression on the outside; the building must announce proudly that it is the latest of its kind. This results in a succession of eclectic styles and a general deterioration of taste. Taste means standards, and standards represent stability—a retrograde thing.

The technical achievements of technocracy have no aesthetics of their own. The technics developed allow all sorts of combinations of shapes and patterns. But the scale they create is the result of a production process, and it is the production process that matters first. Thus the human scale is forgotten. The unit of habitation or work is not recognisable any more from the outside. Though the technic shapes the building, the building ultimately shapes the man. Being regimented by technics is the first step to worse to come.

Once the expression of human scale has become unimportant, a strange change comes over our design. Size means nothing. Small or large objects have a similar look. A universal aesthetic based on the mouldability of things comes into existence. Slowly our eyes learn to appreciate by the standards of production of the plastics industry.

Technocracy encourages bad design. At its best, the scientific thinking tends to abstract life into functions. The functional design of the late twenties resulted in some of the least livable spaces of our time. *La machine d'habité* is out of fashion now and pure functionalism has been mellowed into what Gropius described as the "functionalism of the soul"; so we are, at least some of us, back to the human being undivided. The late Professor Hook's standard



complaint was that he never had a girl student who could design an efficient kitchen. An efficient kitchen may impose on the cook a discipline of fast food production, but to create a beautiful dish one needs fumbling. The girl students were right—efficiency can be a drawback.

At its worst, technocracy can disregard all architectural principles of planning. You don't have to worry about good relationship of room; lifts, escalators, moving footpaths will solve your communications. Air-conditioning will make buildings livable, even if they are badly orientated. A hall need not be solved acoustically; public speaking systems will put it right. Rooms need no windows; artificial light is better.

Windowless, sealed factories provide the best conditions for man and machine alike. Temperature and humidity can be made physiologically perfect; lighting can be adjusted to any process; colour scheming and the right soft music can create the most appropriate mental state. Once human life is broken into processes, this solution applies to every kind of building. We already accept it unquestionably for offices, restaurants, halls. Soon habitation will follow. It will not be anything new—during the war we had air-raid shelters.

This is not an exaggerated picture. These developments are the results of technocracy at its best, aiming continuously for technical perfection. Its way of achieving results is based on a thinking which is abstract, logical and progressive. This sounds rather good, but it is not so. Technocracy's virtues can be more dangerous than its faults.

Thomas Love Peacock, in his *Crochet Castle*, wrote something about science which applies well to technocracy. This was in 1831. I am quoting the Reverend Doctor Folliott: "Everything for everybody, science for all, schools for all, rhetoric for all, law for all, physic for all, words for all, and sense for none." The last words, taken in their strict sense, sum up the danger technocracy represents. It has no sense—no direction. And it never can have.

We must watch technocracy all the time with suspicion. All its offers are to be met with the question, "Why?" Will they help to create better, happier, more-alive people?

The slogan of technocracy is progress. Ours should be balance, equilibrium. The ultimate aim of architecture is man.

Man is an animal, a thinking one, but still an animal. Some people believe he has a soul, and some even think his soul immortal.

The right surroundings help him to be himself, at his organic and spiritual best. This is the aim of all civilisations. He certainly is not a jumble of functions though, unfortunately, he can be reduced to such a state.

As an animal he belongs to a landscape, to the changing moods of the sky. He must be sheltered, but not isolated. The beauty he can see is conditioned by his own shape, size, bone structure. His most transcendent self is but a projection of himself.

Architecture, using the discoveries of technical sciences, can help him to be at peace with the world and himself. Technocracy, using architecture, can never.

On Saturday, 4th January, between 30 to 40 members of the Notting Hill Squatters' Association occupied one of a block of luxury flats in Clarendon Road. The flat, like two others in the block, has been empty for over a year. The cost is £17,450. Half a mile down the same road families are living, eating and sleeping in one room.

This occupation was to draw attention to the inhuman attitude of the council in its policy of encouraging private luxury developments and refusing to rate empty properties. This leads to the buying of housing by racketeers who keep them rate free (and empty) and then re-sell at a large profit.

There is a lot of sympathy for the homeless and overcrowded, but this can't house them. Positive direct action has to be taken. The next time a family must be put into an empty house and then perhaps many more will follow suit. This will involve a lot of pressure on the family and so they need all the support they can get.



# Tenants take over

ANARCHY 83, which put the case for a tenant take-over of municipal housing estates, got quite a good reception. *New Society* conceded that "the idea has its merits", the *Architect's Journal* found it "very sensible and down-to-earth", and one reader thought it had "an absolute genius for marshalling relevant themes and information in an easily-digestible form". Another found that it had "all the basic facts and arguments for a well-informed propaganda campaign" (which was the intention) and yet another declared "I can't help feeling someone ought to sponsor the sending of a copy to every local councillor in the country". We agree, but more important is that it should be in the hands of every tenants' association in the country. This is a time when council tenants are being driven into attitudes of militancy over steep rent increases (thousands of tenants in Walsall and Sheffield have refused to pay them) and more and more local associations are being formed. Wally Gill, general secretary of the National Association of Tenants and Residents declares that "Tenants have a common interest which must make them range their combined strength against the Government, against the national and international finance and property-owning interests which are served by the Government. Not only this particular Government, but government as we have known it throughout living memory." We believe that when it comes to long-term aims, Tenants Take Over should be on the agenda of every tenants' association in the country. ANARCHY 83 is available at 2s. a copy (discount for quantities) from Freedom Press, 84a Whitechapel High Street, London, E.1.

**STOP PRESS ...**

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**Greater London Council  
concedes house  
to Notting Hill Squatters**

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**Redbridge Council  
loses court case  
and wrecks houses  
to keep out Squatters**

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**See current  
FREEDOM**

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