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Title:

Address to the A.I.S.C. Conference Dinner: Government, Development and People

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ADDRESS TO THE A.I.S.C. CONFERENCE DINNER BY THE PREMIER, DON DUNSTAN.

24/9/71.

GOVERNMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND PEOPLE.

MR. PRESIDENT,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

THANK YOU FOR INVITING GRETEL AND ME HERE TONIGHT.

ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT I WOULD LIKE TO WELCOME THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE VISITORS FROM OTHER STATES; I TRUST THAT YOU FIND OUR STATE CONGENIAL AND HOSPITABLE, AND THAT YOUR CONFERENCE IS A SUCCESS.

IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT YOUR CONFERENCE IS THIS YEAR HELD IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA FOR SEVERAL REASONS, NOT THE LEAST AMONG WHICH IS THAT AT WHYALLA, IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S INDUSTRIAL NORTH, ARE CONSTRUCTED THE UNIVERSAL BEAMS WITH WHICH YOUR INSTITUTE IS MOST CONCERNED.

AND, OF COURSE, THE FACT THAT WE PRODUCE ALMOST ALL THE 'H' SECTION STRUCTURAL STEEL AUSTRALIA USES ARISES FROM OUR PLENTIFUL SUPPLY OF VERY HIGH GRADE IRON ORE.

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OUR PRE-EMINENCE IN THIS AREA IS NOT LIKELY TO DIMINISH FOR VERY MANY YEARS, NOTWITHSTANDING THE DRAMATIC ORE DISCOVERIES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

IT CAN BE TRULY SAID THAT STRUCTURAL STEEL HAS CHANGED THE FACE OF WESTERN CIVILISATION.

ONLY SOME FIFTY YEARS AGO MOST NEW BUILDINGS WERE CONSTRUCTED BY METHODS THAT HAD NOT SUBSTANTIALLY CHANGED SINCE THE RENAISSANCE. BRICK OR STONE WALLS WERE STILL THE MAIN LOAD-BEARING COMPONENTS, AND WHILE THE ADVENT OF ELECTRIC OR HYDROLIC LIFTS MERELY ALLOWED BUILDINGS TO BE BUILT TO THE LIMIT OF HEIGHT THAT BRICK OR STONE COULD BEAR, THERE WERE, OF COURSE, ECONOMIC PRESSURES FOR MORE HEIGHT PER SITE. IN 1888 IN SPITE OF SOLID MASONRY WALLS THE PULITZER BUILDING IN NEW YORK REACHED A HEIGHT OF 349 FEET. BUT IT WAS HARDLY A 'LIBERATED' FORM OF ARCHITECTURE.

IN FACT, SOME OF THE MOST GROSS ARCHITECTURE BUILT IN AUSTRALIA WAS BUILT IN THE PERIOD 1900 TO 1920 AT THAT TRANSITION STAGE IN WHICH LIFTS MADE HIGHER BUILDINGS POSSIBLE, WHILE ARCHITECTS CONTINUED TO DESIGN AS IF THEY WERE DEALING WITH ONLY THREE STOREYS.

IN FACT, IN AUSTRALIA, DURING THAT TRANSITION PERIOD, WE WERE SOMEWHAT LATE IN REALLY UNDERSTANDING JUST HOW RADICALLY CITY ARCHITECTURE WAS CHANGING.

THE GREAT AMERICAN ARCHITECT, LOUIS SULLIVAN, CAN, I THINK, BE DESCRIBED AS THE FATHER OF STEEL CONSTRUCTION, AND HIS WAINWRIGHT BUILDING IN ST. LOUIS WAS THE FIRST BUILDING TO USE STEEL AND ALLOW IT TO BE SEEN TO BE USED AS THE MAIN ELEMENT IN CONSTRUCTION.

IT WAS BUILT IN 1890, LONG BEFORE SUCH ADVANCED IDEAS REACHED HERE. BUT NEVERTHELESS, EVEN 1890 IS NOT SO LONG AGO - JUST EIGHTY ODD YEARS.

SINCE THEN, OF COURSE, STEEL CONSTRUCTION AND FUNCTIONAL DESIGN IN BUILDINGS HAVE BECOME COMMONPLACE THE WORLD OVER, AND WE NOW HAVE WHAT ROBIN BOYD HAS DESCRIBED AS TWO PREVAILING ARCHITECTURAL MODES, THE AMERICAN 'PACKAGE' AND THE EUROPEAN 'BUILDING'.

IN THE FORMER HE SAYS WE HAVE A STYLE OF BUILDING WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY STANDARDISED, WITH ONLY THE EXTERNAL FACINGS ADDING DISTINCTION OR STYLE, WHILE WITH THE EUROPEAN BUILDING, HE SAYS WE HAVE A STRUCTURE WHICH TENDS TO EXPRESS ITS FUNCTION AND LOOKS MORE 'BUILT' THAN THE AMERICAN GLOSSY, BUT SOMEWHAT ANONYMOUS, TOWER.

OUR DOWN-TOWN STREETS AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES HAVE EXAMPLES OF BOTH.

STEEL IS, OF COURSE, WITH US TO STAY.

IT DOMINATES OUR CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES IN ALL AREAS EXCEPT THE SUBURBAN HOUSE.

WITH ITS EMERGENT PRE-EMINENCE AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE MODERN OFFICE TOWER HAVE COME A THOUSAND AND ONE MASS PRODUCED BUILDING COMPONENTS.

THESE HAVE ALSO REVOLUTIONISED OUR IDEAS OF WHAT A BUILDING IS, AS

WELL AS RADICALLY CHANGING THE ECONOMICS OF ITS CONSTRUCTION.

JUST HOW RADICALLY WE HAVE ALTERED OUR CONCEPTS OF HOW A BUILDING SHOULD LOOK AND WORK WAS BORNE IN ON ME SOME YEARS AGO.

WHEN IN 1965 THE ALP CAME INTO OFFICE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA, UNDER THE PREMIERSHIP OF FRANK WALSH, THE PREMIER'S SUITE WAS IN THE VERY HANDSOME MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY BUILDING WHICH NOW HOUSES THE TREASURY AND THE DEPARTMENT OF LANDS.

THE BUILDING IS A TYPICAL COLONIAL OFFICE BUILDING OF THE PERIOD, THREE STOREYS HIGH, WHITE, SURROUNDING AN INNER COURT.

IT IS CONSTRUCTED OF STONE AND MORTAR FILL, WITH A STUCCO FINISH, AND ITS ROOMS ARE AS YOU WOULD IMAGINE THEM, LARGE, HIGH CEILINGED, AND ORNATE.

IT WAS A BUILDING WHICH WAS, BY AND LARGE, UNCOMPROMISING ABOUT ITS FUNCTION - WHICH WAS COLONIAL GOVERNMENT OF THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY, WITH CLERKS ON HIGH STOOLS, COPYISTS, AND MINISTERS AND SECRETARIES INHABITATING ROOMS OF COLD AND RATHER FORMAL VICTORIAN SOMBRENESS.

THE PREMIER'S DEPARTMENT IS NOW HOUSED IN AN EIGHTEEN STOREY STANDARD STEEL FRAMED BUILDING IN VICTORIA SQUARE, BUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO LOCATIONS IS NOT JUST A MATTER OF MODERNITY.

THE OLD TREASURY BUILDING WAS, AS IT WERE, HANDMADE, FROM THE SHIFTING OF THE FIRST CLOD OF EARTH TO THE FINAL SMALL WOODEN CORNICE, WHEREAS IN THE NEW STATE ADMINISTRATION BUILDING HANDCRAFTING IS ALMOST ENTIRELY ABSENT.

LOOKING ABOUT MY ROOM, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MY DESK, THERE IS NOT ONE ELEMENT THAT HAS NOT BEEN MASS-PRODUCED OFF-SITE.

AND I THINK THERE IS A LESSON TO BE LEARNT IN THIS, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO MY STATE'S INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, YOUR INTEREST IN STEEL CONSTRUCTION, AND MY INTEREST IN BETTER DESIGNED AND LOWER COST HOUSING.

THE NEW CONCEPTS AND MASS-PRODUCTION DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT ARE NOW STANDARD TO MODERN OFFICE BLOCKS AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND WHICH ALLOW A MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY IN ARRANGING THE INTERNAL DESIGN TO SUIT THE DEVELOPING AND CHANGING FUNCTIONS OF OFFICES, HAVE NEVER BEEN EFFECTIVELY TRANSLATED TO THE SCALE NEEDED FOR DOMESTIC HOUSE, FLAT OR TERRACE CONSTRUCTION.

TO TRAVEL THROUGH ANY SUBURBAN AREA IN ADELAIDE DEVELOPED AFTER 1920, (AND UP UNTIL THE PRESENT DAY) IS TO SEE WHAT ARE, BY AND LARGE, BUILDINGS CONSTRUCTED WITH TECHNIQUES THAT HAVE SIMPLY NOT TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE NEW AND STUPENDOUS BODY OF KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNIQUES UPON WHICH IS BASED YOUR INDUSTRIES' 'BREAD AND BUTTER'.

THIS IS, OF COURSE, CHANGING, BUT ONLY marginally, AND CERTAINLY WITHOUT INCORPORATING THE MODULAR CONCEPTS THAT THE STEEL INDUSTRY INITIALLY, AND SUBSEQUENTLY THE MAKERS OF PLASTER COMPONENTS AND WOODEN PARTITIONS, HAVE DEVELOPED.

AND SO, AS A CONSEQUENCE, IN AUSTRALIA THAT AREA OF BUILDING WHICH IS HOUSING, AND WHICH CONSTITUTES ALMOST 53% IN VALUE OF OUR TOTAL BUILDING ACTIVITY, HAS NOT ONLY NEVER TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE ECONOMICS OF SCALE THAT ARE AVAILABLE, BUT ALSO IN TERMS OF DESIGN HAVE NEVER HAD THE ADVANTAGES OF THOSE SCALES TO STANDARDISE THE SHAPE AND TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CONFLICTING ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN ACQUIRED AS PART AND PARCEL OF AN INHERENT CONSERVATISM AND DESIGN INADEQUACY IN THE HOUSING INDUSTRY.

TO PUT IT ANOTHER WAY, MASS PRODUCTION HAS ALLOWED THE ARCHITECT TO MOVE WITHIN AN AREA THAT MAKES IT EASIER AND OFTEN MORE ECONOMIC TO DESIGN WELL THAN TO DESIGN BADLY - AND THE SAME COULD APPLY TO THE HOUSING INDUSTRY.

IN OTHER COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD THIS PROCESS HAS IN FACT STARTED, ESPECIALLY IN THOSE COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE HAD A TRADITIONALLY HIGH-DENSITY LIVING STYLE.

IN SUCH COMMUNITIES, THE BUILDING INDUSTRY HAS TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF NEW TECHNIQUES.

BUT IN AUSTRALIA, WE STILL AWAIT A BREAK-THROUGH IN THIS AREA.

NOW IT SEEMS TO ME THAT ONE OF THE AREAS WHICH COULD BE MOST PROFITABLY INVESTIGATED IN THIS IS THE STEEL CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY. THE FLEXIBILITY OF STEEL, ITS VERY PLEASANT ARCHITECTURAL PROPERTIES (AS EXEMPLIFIED, FOR INSTANCE, BY THE B.H.P. RESEARCH LABORATORIES AT CLAYTON), ITS NATURAL AFFINITY AS A METAL TO A WIDE RANGING NUMBER OF MASS PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES AND PROCESSES, ALL INDICATE ONE AREA OF PROFITABLE RESEARCH AND SUBSEQUENT INVESTMENT.

FURTHER, I HOPE THAT THIS PROCESS WILL OCCUR IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA. ONE OF THE PROJECTS WHICH WE ARE LOOKING AT IN GOVERNMENT IS THE POSSIBLE ESTABLISHMENT OF A HOUSING RESEARCH AND DESIGN INSTITUTE, WHICH WILL BE ABLE TO DEVELOP THE PROCESSES AND INVESTIGATE THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES AS THEY CAN BE APPLIED TO HOUSING DESIGN AND ECONOMIES IN AUSTRALIA.

IT IS HOPED THAT THE BUILDING INDUSTRY WILL JOIN WITH THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IN SUCH A PROJECT, MUCH IN THE SAME WAY AS THE MINING INDUSTRY HAS WITH THE MINERAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION HERE.

SUCH A CENTER COULD ALLOW SOUTH AUSTRALIA TO TAKE A MAJOR INDUSTRIAL LEAD IN THE MANUFACTURE OF EFFECTIVELY DESIGNED, LOW COST HOUSING THAT WOULD HELP MAKE OUR CITIES NOT EVER EXPANDING SUBURBAN AREAS BUT RATHER INTEGRATED COMMUNITIES IN WHICH PEOPLE CAN BOTH ACHIEVE THE PRIVACY THEY WISH AND THE SOCIAL COHESION THEY NEED.

I BELIEVE THAT THE STEEL CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY CAN IN A LARGE WAY SHARE IN THIS PROCESS.
