

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DAWJ #6  
Detour to Expo

R.R. #9,  
Dunnville, Ontario,  
Canada.

May 22nd, 1967.

Richard H. Nolte, Esq.,  
Executive Director,  
Institute of Current World Affairs,  
366 Madison Avenue,  
New York, 17, N.Y.

Dear Dick:

We were due to leave Montreal at the end of April on the next leg of our Siberian safari. At the last minute we succumbed and stayed for an extra week to see Expo.

The hoop-la and publicity that had been blasting out of Expo headquarters for a year had had its effect. We were a slightly jaded family when we set out on opening day to see the Universal and International Exhibition of 1967 - the only First Category Exposition ever held in America, etc. We were in for a shock. Expo turns out to be only a little short of superb.

A lot of people were surprised by what they saw. There was a general gasp of astonishment in the press. Mike Pearson, the Prime Minister, whose standards of oratory are not quite those of Cicero, could only grope for a phrase. The best he could do was to say that Canadians could now give up breast beating for tub thumping. And it's funny to hear the kind of tubs we thump. The first delighted reports in the mass media didn't refer to the beauty and marvellous colour of the site, nor to the splendid appearance of the pavilions. It was dirt which was impressive. We, it was proclaimed on tub number one, had moved fifteen million tons of fill by truck to make an island and a half in mid St. Lawrence. Another 6.8 million tons of muck had been sucked up from the river bed. Montreal city and Quebec province built fifteen miles of subway (no figures for dirt here) and many more miles of highway and eighteen bridges. All this was a bit reminiscent of the praise for Vimy Ridge, the 1917 Canadian victory whose 50th anniversary was celebrated this year. In retrospect, our military prowess at Vimy was not due to tactical brilliance but to painstaking staff work and months of digging. Maybe we are a nation of methodical cat skimmers.

The national unity tub was the next one to be beaten. This never is allowed to play solo. Good Quebecers quickly hand out their instruments. The result is not harmonious. Expo, so the federal tub says,

is a triumph for Canada, a symbol of unity and proof that we can work and live together. Not so, says the Ste. Jean Baptiste tub. Without Quebec Expo would be nothing. The achievement is another step towards a separate French state in North America. A third tub is yet to be heard from but it will soon make up the trio after Anglo-Saxon Canada begins to arrive en masse in Montreal in the summer holidays. Expo is bicultural, equal layers of French and English. But for the first time in a national event in this country, French is clearly on top. Any visitor to Canada who has only a hazy knowledge of the country will certainly get the impression that it is the English who are in the minority here. Those who beat the WASP tub will do their noisy best to dispel such a distasteful conclusion.

Watching bilingualism at Expo is a little like assessing Peking wall posters. In the Canadian federal exhibits English generally takes precedence but French gets equal space. In the Quebec provincial pavilion the order is reversed but English receives scrupulous attention and is spoken fluently. Outside these relatively small areas French predominates and English is often practically unintelligible. No doubt the accents will improve as the summer goes by.

The foreign pavilions do their best to survive in this delicate bilingual atmosphere. The Americans seem to have recruited Cajuns, the Belgians, Swiss et al are right at home. The Australians have taught their cockatoos French. Japan, Taiwan, India and others of that ilk have had to be content with a few "Defense de Fumer" signs.

But all this is really beside the point. Expo's worth is not to be judged by its effects on our national maladies.

It is the eye that responds first. The Expo grounds in the St. Lawrence are not spectacular. As scenery goes in this world the river around Montreal is rather dull (and polluted). But this neutral background is a splendid setting for the pavilions. It shows off their marvellous array of shapes, contours and colours. The place is a garden of architectural sculptures in a mosaic of canals, fountains and ponds. To the eye nothing is congested. Every building stands by itself, set apart by esplanades, bridges, flowers and grass. At a distance the variety of shapes blend into an inspiring harmony. There is little that is stilted or trite to look at. Even the pop-corn stands in La Ronde come off well.

The national pavilions, about sixty in all, are the core of the show. Only a few of them are glorified trade exhibits. The rest follow no common pattern. Some concentrate on history, others stress culture, people, or technology. Some combine all themes. No exhibit would be a clear winner; there are too many of a high standard to make a judgement of this sort possible or meaningful.

The theme pavilions may be something new. Expo's sub-title is "Man and His World" - after Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Seven pavilions have been constructed to illustrate the point. They are worth a day's

tour. I recommend that anyone who decides to spend some time doing this should start with the Labyrinth near the main entrance to Expo and move from there south and east across the mainland and the two islands taking in each theme pavilion along the way. With the exception of the Labyrinth and its two sister pavilions on the mainland, the other theme exhibits are housed in gaint steel structures that look like hexagonal waffles. They are distinctive and easily marked on the horizon, if nothing else.

These seven theme pavilions do not blare out a ponderous message. They tend to be thought provoking rather than pedantic. Fortunately too, they are often thoroughly entertaining.

What do they all add up to ? A look at man's environment and problems with the stress on the complexity of the world rather than on man's inventiveness and tinkering. Two quotes taken at random from exhibits show the trend of thought:

"Capitalism, communism and socialism are different systems for sharing the benefits which today's technology could place within the reach of all. The age of innocence is over and the whole world must face the problems of maturity."

"Word and deed go round the world in a moment, - what are we still seeking?"

There is another theme at Expo about man and his world which wasn't intended to be part of the show. Like man and his world today, Expo is congested. The show may choke on its own success. It was designed to cope with 35 million visits over six months. At the present rate of attendance the turnstiles may turn over 60 million times.

All these people put a strain on things. On the first Saturday we were there the Montreal Metro had to close down four times because of congestion underground. The Expo Express, the Exhibition's own trans island train has a capacity of 30,000 an hour. One morning 27,000 people converged on the main station within twenty minutes of opening time. It took an hour and a half to sort that one out. The minirail, an overhead sightseeing train built by the Swiss, provides a stirring view of over half the exhibition, - when you can get on it. People in lineups here waited for almost two hours.

Food was worst of all. Many national pavilions have excellent restaurants. They are elegant, very expensive and totally foreign to the North American who is on the lookout for a snack. To cater for these mundane tastes, Expo has leased concessions where you can buy a wide range of traditional Canadian cuisine such as chow mein, pizza or kebabs at reasonable prices. Both categories of victualers however have a combined capacity of 23,000. On a slack day there were 150,000 people at Expo and lineups at lunch were usually  $3/4$  of an hour long. The definition of a slack day was a Monday morning with wet snow, rain and wind blowing up the St. Lawrence. (Note Bene On that particular Monday it was a balmy 65° in

Yukon.) On other days there could be as many as 500,000 people. My wife got full marks for the sandwiches she had brought.

### AWARDS

Our panel of judges consisted of three discerning taxpayers, Ann my wife, my father, 84 (who kept making disconcerting comparisons to the Chicago Exposition of 1892) and me. Timothy - aged 21 months was not allowed to participate. We have hopelessly antique ideas in our family about communicating with children.

- Architecture: to the West German Pavilion...there were several close contenders.
- Interior: to the Czech Pavilion - by a long shot.
- Biggest Disappointment: U.S. pavilion.
- Corniest Dialogue: Western Canadian Provinces Pavilion, "...the west ripples with the muscles of industry...bristling with vigour, pulsating with energy....(Westerners) are men and women building for a Great tomorrow...they dream Big in the West...." All read by someone who must have tried to understudy Lorne Green on "Bonanza." The rest of the exhibit is better.
- To Carnaby Street: for clothing the hostesses of a score of national pavilions.
- To the Indian Pavilion: for showing that the sari can still outdo Carnaby Street anyday.
- Immensity: the U.S.S.R. pavilion. This was the only pavilion we were in that invited written comments. A sample ranged from, "FANTASTIC" (signed....Montreal), to this gem: "If Russia is as good as this then why do so many of your people defect ? (sic) (signed....Bader, Ontario), Land of the Free." The show here was splendid and political overtones soft pedalled (pace Bader, Ontario). Most startling flaw was the unrelieved phalanx of middle-aged male attendants. Not one gorgeous Slavic hostess to be seen.
- For Being Provocative: Canadian Indian Pavilion. No noble savage message here. Betrayal, exploitation and misery predominate with everyone from missionaries to bureaucrats coming in for a swipe, - except Indians.

Originality:

British Pavilion. After a cursory look at history - Caesar to Churchill in the time it takes to eat a hot dog - the exhibit gets down to the nub..."The British (it asks) - are they dignified, stuffed shirts, chivalrous, humbugs - just shy?"

Some of the answers:

- (i) A mannequin of a (typical ?) British housewife perpetually dressed as though she had just come in from a hard day's beagling.
- (ii) a sprinkling of informative national statistics e.g..."To every cow we have two cars."
- (iii) a statement of fundamental beliefs - "We believe...in puddings."
- (iv) and a smattering of British modesty such as the sign surmounting a papier-maché model of congealed fish and chips lying inert, greasy and cold on the News of the World. "We believe in good food, simply cooked."

All of this is good stuff. The International Bureau of Exhibitions should insist that each country include one exhibit poking fun at themselves. Better still, there should be one World's Fair every twenty years reserved wholly for national parodies. Can't you see Nasser, De Gaulle or Chiang Kai-shek doing a take off of themselves? It is a riotously funny idea to a Canadian....until you remember John Diefenbaker.

Noble Effort:

to the Australian police constable speaking French at the Australian pavilion. We stayed around to see if we could understand his English.

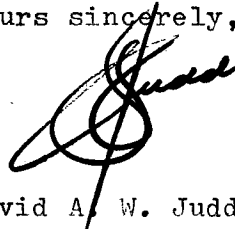
A final laurel:

to the movies - and not just for providing a welcome place to sit. At Expo they are better than ever. Outstanding ones we saw were in the Theme, the Czech, Swiss and Christian pavilions. There were all manner of new techniques, - from a hundred individual screens to movies on the floor and the ceiling. These special effects were

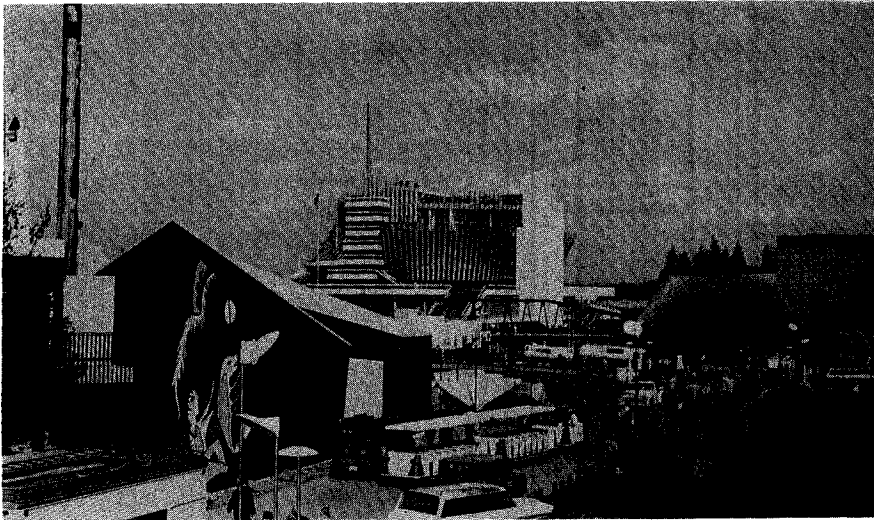
used with discipline and not allowed to run away with the show. They added greatly to entertainment and impact.

This report covers six days of sightseeing but in this time we probably visited not more than two-thirds of the exhibition. I forgot to mention in my opening statistics that it is supposed to take eight days of steady walking to trudge over every sidewalk, esplanade and corridor in Expo's 1,000 acres. So all of this has not only been enthusiastically biased but incomplete as well. There will be many people who will quarrel with us but few who won't enjoy themselves at Expo.

Yours sincerely,

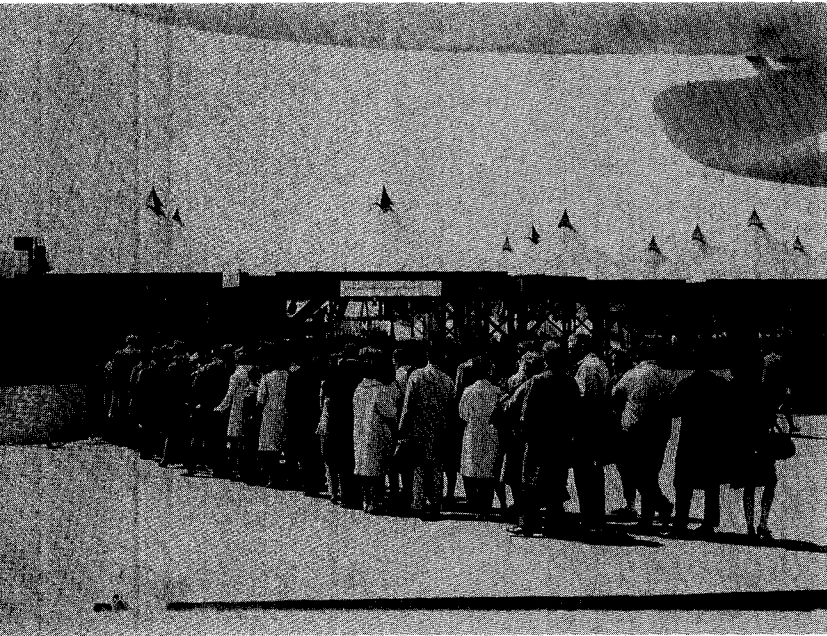


David A. W. Judd

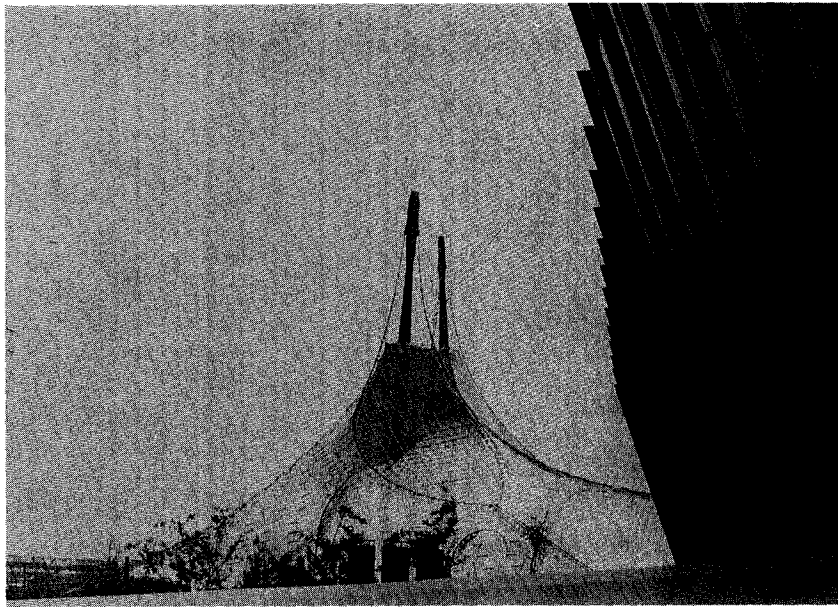


Canadian Indian Pavilion in the foreground,  
France in the rear. Trees grow out of the  
roof of the Western Provinces Pavilion on  
the right.

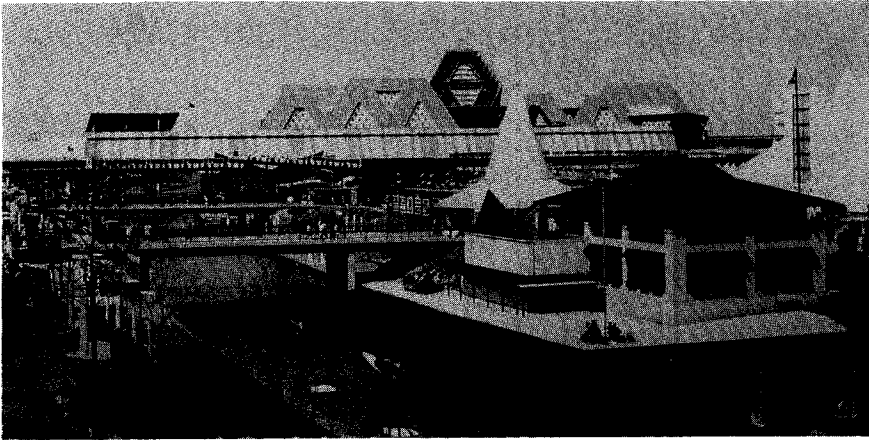
Received in New York May 25, 1967.



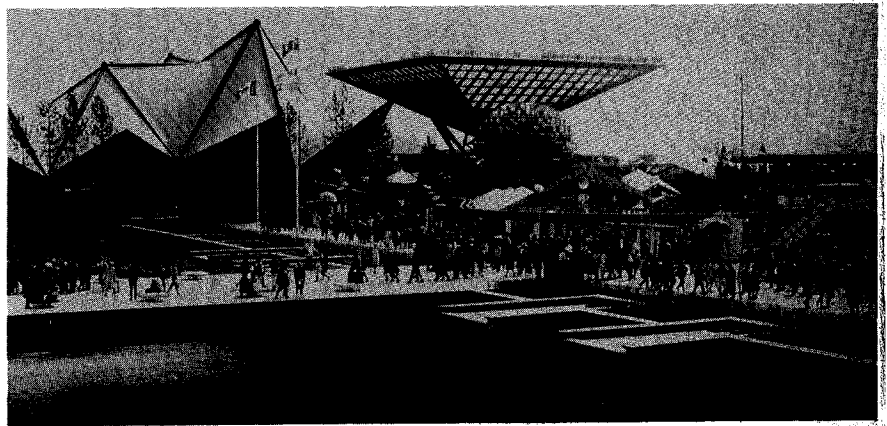
Lineup for lunch on a slack day



West German Pavilion



Trinidad and Tobago in the foreground.  
Some theme pavilions on the skyline.



Canadian Pavilion on the right;  
Ontario on the left.