

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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New York State Looks at New Communities:
The Tiger Is Walking on Tiptoe

c/o 201 E. 28th Street
New York 10016

July 4, 1969

Mr. R. H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte,

The director of Tarrytown House "an estate for Executive Seminars" gazed at the group sitting on his moonlit veranda the other evening, and said, "In our experience, meetings held the week before a holiday like the Fourth of July are always unattended, usually only 25% of the expected group shows up. . . . But here you all are. . . ."

The conference was called New York State Looks at New Communities, it was co-sponsored by Urban America, Inc., and the New York State Urban Development Corporation. Urban America, Inc., is a foundation supported non-profit organization "dedicated to improving the quality of life in the nation's cities." In addition to publishing a stunning magazine (CITY) and occasional books (like The New City, see ERL 20), running an information exchange and research center, Urban America also promotes conferences and travel. In other words it lobbies stylishly. The New York State Urban Development Corporation is something else again. Its purpose is "to carry out projects that will increase low and moderate income housing, help alleviate unemployment, revitalize industry, and expand community facilities--in cooperation with local communities and private enterprise. The UDC, an unique agency in the federal union, which was born in April 1968, has powers nearly as grand as its mandate. It may and can borrow up to one billion dollars; it may exercise powers of eminent domain, plan, build, manage or own projects. It may form partnerships. It may renew or construct projects by local invitation. But, it may also do all these things without local invitation.

Paper powers make paper tigers, and the UDC might be dismissed were it not for the fact that its president and chief executive officer is Edward J. Logue. The famed ruthless renewer of New Haven and Boston in the late fifties and early sixties had flirted with the possibility of becoming housing czar of New York City in the early months of the Lindsay administration when public officials still talked of doing something about the city's nightmare housing problems. Logue turned in a report recommending a kind of reorganization of the city that he thought would make a "czardom" workable. Mayors Lee of New Haven and Collins of Boston had such firm political support behind their administrations that they were able to meet his conditions. Lindsay, a fusion, minority party mayor couldn't make the same kind of offer, so Logue turned instead to the starcrossed Fort

Lincoln project in Washington, D.C., one of the hurtful domestic scars of the Johnson Administration. He had no intention of returning to New York until he was approached by Governor Rockefeller to head the UDC.

Urban renewal, which its protagonists call city building, as practiced most successfully by Ed Logue, involved extensive displacement of inner city occupied buildings. In the United States the poor and the black get displaced for the convenience and prosperity of the middle class and their cars. As a reward for his achievements, Ed Logue, is cordially loved and loathed along the eastern megalopolis. It is a matter of public record that he urban renewed numbers of poor and black people out of their neighborhoods without much democratic nonsense about consultation or local participation in planning. It is also a matter of fact that commercial New Haven and Boston were, indeed, revitalized and have entertained great gulps of profit-making center city construction.

The UDC mandate included provisions for real city building, not just city repairing with its inevitable displacement of families and businesses, but city construction on open land, veritably, empire building in the Empire State. To a man happiest with power the offer was irresistible. So, Ed Logue came to New York.

The UDC's first year has been very quiet which makes some people nervous. Very nervous. Logue has been purring softly over invitations UDC has had to fix up various floundering urban renewal projects around the state. "We haven't had a new idea this year," he says, "and that's just fine. We're offering to help, we want to be invited into projects. If we never have any new ideas, but just go along picking up other people's that will be all right with me." Ever since the smiling lady got swallowed, though, tigers have had a built-in credibility gap. And his staff has reason to call Logue "the tiger." It just so happens that the UDC has bought a nice piece of land, some 2100 acres, a former Army Ordnance installation, twelve miles outside of Syracuse. Empty land. Just right for new town development, maybe. And UDC has been asked to take a hand in the development of the Buffalo-Amherst Corridor in the western corner of the state where the State University of New York (SUNY) is about to start building a campus for 50,000 students. But, as Logue observed with charming candor, "There is no natural constituency for new towns in New York State."

The conference program was artfully drawn. It appeared, indeed it was, bland and superficial, designed to gently raise questions, and suggest paths for partnership, not answer questions, either of politics or policy. Thus the conferees arrived at Tarrytown House on a hot afternoon wondering: who would be there, who would not, how much would be said, how much would be left unsaid, who would be in charge?

As befitted a co-sponsor Bill Slayton, executive vice president of Urban America, Inc., and former Commissioner of the Urban Renewal Administration, asked at least one pertinent well-phrased question of each speaker and made several gracious introductions. Ed Logue said to the opening session: "There aren't going to be any three man panels at this conference where the panelists all talk to each other and the audience gets five minutes at the end. I think they are a waste of time. Each speaker will have 45 minutes and the rest of the hour for questions from the floor. And I mean 45 minutes." Privately he added his belief

in the credo of most executive conferences, that the real business of talking to people takes place in the bar, by the swimming pool or on the tennis courts, and not in the auditorium.

Who was there? The fraternity was well represented. Every field has a fraternity and somehow, to the members, each seems small, full of old friends and former colleagues whose personal strengths and weaknesses are well known in the group. The fraternity of professional city administrators and builders of the late fifties and early sixties has a double locus in Bill Slayton and Ed Logue who trained troops in Washington and Boston--There were nearly thirty men under or not much over forty who had worked for Slayton or Logue and are now scattered in new cities, new projects, new planning organizations. A number have been recruited to the UDC and were there with Logue to meet New Yorkers. There were twenty representatives of New York State agencies ranging from the State University Construction Fund and the Pure Water Authority to the Office of Planning Coordination, the Department of Mental Hygiene, the Department of Commerce, the State Office for Local Government and the Center for Planning and Innovation of the State Education Department. Their interest in the UDC's plans ranged from curiosity to anxiety. There were other institutions, foundations and interest groups present. Two large corporations based upstate, Eastman Kodak and Xerox, sent their bright young men who "do" their urban matters. There were a number of investment banking firms, a few Wall Street lawyers, and a few journalists. There were less than one hundred people at each session, although the composition of the group varied, so the total was probably close to 125.

Nearly everyone commented on the Republicans. The Lieutenant Governor and State Senators, however, received less attention than Leonard Hall, former National Chairman of the Republican Party, who listed himself at his law firm but allowed that he was there "pro bono publico for the Nassau-Suffolk Bi-County Planning Authority and the Mitchell Field Development Corporation." He proceeded to systematically disarm people surprised to see so famous a politician in such a setting with anecdotes and one-liners. "I first ran for the Assembly in 1926 against the Klu Klux Klan . . . it's hard to remember now . . . The days of parties as I knew them are over. Why I used to be able to look at the list of who had voted in my district and tell you the tally before they opened the box. Now I can't even tell you how Mrs. Hall votes." Of all the Democrats in New York State, a shattered and motley crew, only Stanley Steingut of Brooklyn sent an emissary. The AFL-CIO Council of Buffalo sent its president. The State Highway Authority was conspicuously not represented, neither were the construction trades. T'was curious indeed, more people than expected had come, but one could not tell if the absent were snubbing or had been snubbed.

The welcoming speech of the Lieutenant Governor, speaking for Nelson Rockefeller who was off in Latin America, was notable because it added a corollary to a maxim. As you know, "A cat can look at a king," it also seems that "a cat can wash when politicians pontificate." While Lt. Gov. Wilson was busily calling for the strength of local home rule and the simultaneous development of model new towns on the moonlit veranda, a large marmelade and white cat crawled under ankles, jumped on a balustrade, and proceeded to bathe so elegantly that no one paid much attention to the rest of the speech.

Surprising as it may seem to readers who follow these Institute newsletters the majority of the men attending the meeting had no idea of what a publicly built new town might mean, or that some countries have them. The first morning session was therefore turned over to Wyndham Thomas, formerly head of the Town and Country Planning Association in Britain and now General Manager of the Peterborough Development Corporation. (Peterborough is an existing town that is going to be deliberately expanded.) Thomas, an eloquent Welshman who made light of being in New York at the very moment of the Investiture in Wales, gave an easy introduction to the British new towns policy. I am delighted to report that he used twenty slides of Harlow to illustrate the best all-round new town in Britain. As the extent of the central government's planning power dawned on the audience there was a faint shudder of "it can't happen here," in the room.

Professor Alan Campbell, Dean of the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, didn't exactly say it that way. He said "to fit a new town into the system of local government in New York State requires the ingenuity of a Rube Goldberg." The reason behind his pessimism is the power tenaciously held by the smallest governmental units in the state--the villages--the power to zone. Professor Campbell led the floor fight at the recent constitutional convention to shift zoning powers to the county level. Since losing, he's argued that new towns cannot be realistically absorbed in the present muddle of governmental authorities. It conveniently happens, however, that he is currently musing on methods of reorganizing state and local government into what he calls a "two tier" system. From experience and training he is a pessimist. He noted the limited experiences with metropolitan government (Dade and Davidson Counties) and the need for the approval and cooperation of minority groups in creating it. He also noted the movement against metropolitan government precisely because of the strength of minority groups in center cities. A bit of uncomic relief came when he cited a pamphlet from a group "somewhere in Texas" which points out that metropolitan government is often called "Metro government" and insists it is not coincidental that Metro is what they call the subways in the Soviet Union. In other words, Professor Campbell reads the reality of reaction and intransigence loud and clear.

Professor K. C. Parsons of Cornell prefaced a dry introductory lecture in land usage, calling for the creation of land banks with perhaps the most perceptive and incisive comment of the entire conference although it had nothing whatever to do with new towns. "If the enemy (of the organized urban future) is the suburb," he said blandly, "we are our own worst enemies." Not more than a dozen people in the room--professionals all--lived in a center city.

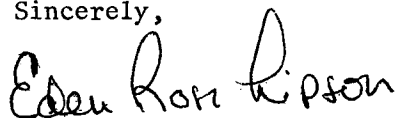
Dr. Kenneth Clark is one of the directors of the UDC, and plans on visiting Sweden this summer to study the new towns there and see if the absence of a racial issue has affected the process and the product. Dr. Clark is heartily sick of tokenism, yet must continue to play token roles. His presence on the program no doubt appeased those who merely look for the obligatory black name and take no account of the topic. Dr. Clark devoted his 45 minutes to a discussion of bitter realities --the state of our cities--and sleazy myths--new towns are sterile.

The following day William Finley of the Rouse Company set forth several of the reasons that Columbia, Maryland is probably the first and the last of the big, private new towns. One problem he stressed was that of land acquisition, the other was financing. It sounds dreamlike to remember that Rouse went to Connecticut General Life Insurance and said, in effect, "Let us borrow 50 million dollars; defer all repayment for ten years; we'll do all the work and we'll split the profit 50-50." In reciting the history of Columbia Mr. Finley dropped out what used to be a touchstone of the case--the location of the site at almost the midpoint of the Baltimore-Washington Corridor. Curiously, no one mentioned it in the question period. Perhaps the crucial relevance of site location was thoroughly understood by all, but I suspect not. The friendly questioners who helped each of the speakers clarify and strengthen their points in favor of new town development might have preferred to hear Columbia's successes rested on sound management and shrewd financing.

At the final session, after generously summarizing all the talks, Ed Logue gave a short rapid fire summary of the UDC projects already underway that will produce "new communities" in New York State. It's all public knowledge--the land acquisition outside Syracuse and the Buffalo-Amherst Corridor, the contract for housing development on Welfare Island in New York City, but it has had very little publicity, and, as all the projects are in the planning stage no one really knows what is going on. Logue stressed the housing policy UDC intends to follow: 70-20-10. Seventy per cent middle income housing, twenty per cent low income and ten per cent for the elderly. He says the same formula was reached independently for each project, but will be strictly followed. He announced that the UDC is looking for partners, supporters, and friends.

Was it worthwhile? It was exceedingly pleasant. I have no idea how much solid information was transmitted, and I have less of an idea of how much was sought. The whole meeting was low key and soft sell. But Logue has a track record, as well as a lot of paper power. He talked continually of invitation and cooperation, constituency and collaboration. The conference was called New York State Looks at New Communities. It might as well have been "How to Win Friends and Influence Bureaucrats," or "Getting to Know You." In any event, one had the distinct impression of a tiger on tiptoe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eden Ross Lipson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Eden Ross Lipson

Received in New York on July 8, 1969.