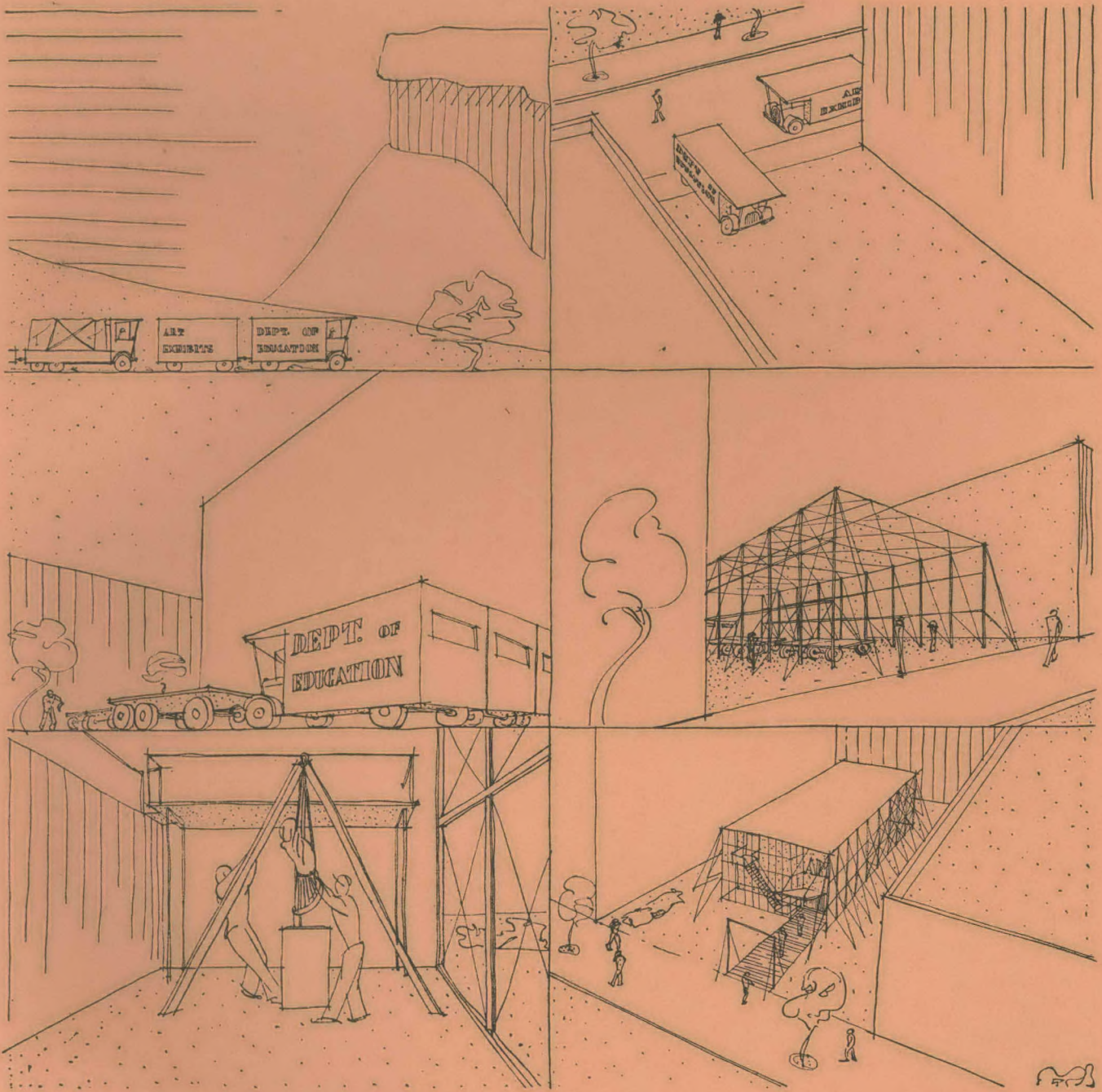




DECEMBER 1940

SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

C O N T E N T S

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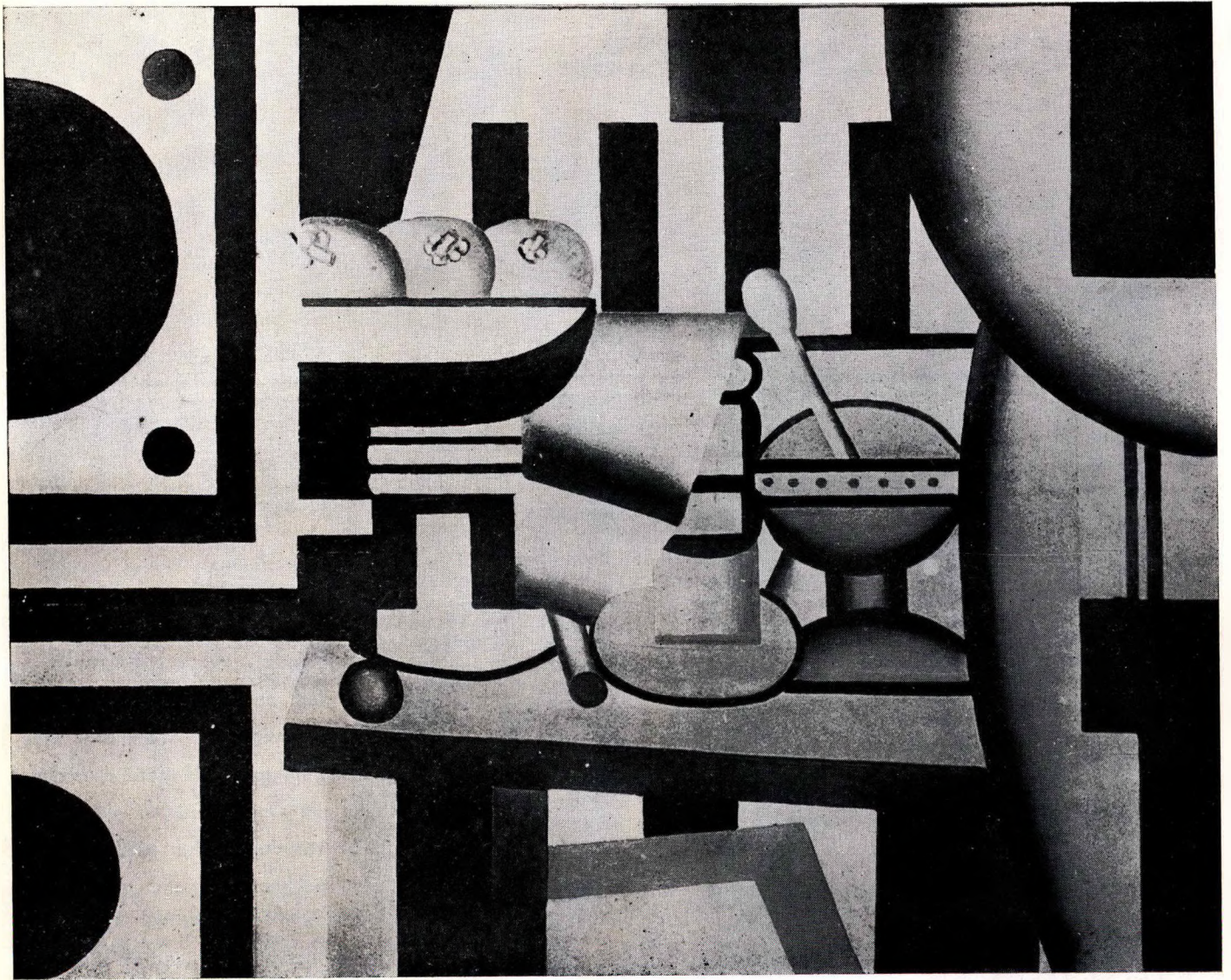
202, Kelvin House, 75, Marshall
St., Johannesburg. Telephone 34-2921

Volume Twenty Five, Number Twelve,
December, 1940.

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STILL LIFE

FERNAND LEGER

H O U S I N G O R H O L O C A U S T

An address delivered to the Bloemfontein Branch of the National Council of Women of South Africa, on 23rd October, 1940.

By MONTE BRYER

It is my privilege to address you on the subject of Housing—one of the most important of all matters of human concern. This theme is so urgent and covers so wide a field that what I am about to say to you falls far below its demands. Many of my remarks could readily be expanded into very lengthy discussions, but my aim is to make clear to you the broad aspects and the central issues of Housing.



The problem of housing, as we know it to-day, is the problem of human environment. The magnitude of this problem, with its ramifications reaching into every sphere of human activity, is directly due to the developments of the 19th century. It is one of the great ironies of history that the century which produced more promise of human advancement than all the preceding epochs of western civilisation put together, was the one that debased human environment to the lowest level known.

One of the yardsticks for measuring the quality and achievements of a civilisation, whether it be in the time of Einstein or Euclid, is the use to which an age puts its human and material resources, its wealth, knowledge, and power, in order to create a social life. Gauged by this measure, the 19th century as a civilisation is a record of failure.

In South Africa, the influence and effects of industrialism on the form and quality of human environment, have, in the main, been no different from those in Europe and America. We may note local variations due to peculiar economic, political, and sociological conditions, but here, in Johannesburg, Capetown, Durban, etc., as in Berlin, Lyons, Manchester, Toronto, and Philadelphia, the same forces have been at work, impelled by the same motives and purposes. The 19th century begot nationalism of a highly pronounced order, but the main lines of the panorama of human environment are international in scope.

To understand how it was that the period which, paradoxically enough, was the one that invented the notion of Progress, failed to create an environment commensurate with the possibility of fulfilling this idea, it is necessary to examine the credos and principles on which the idea was based.

First we have the economic doctrine of laissez-faire, which the western world believed in with the unquestioning certainty of a religious faith. And second, we have the scientific doctrine of the survival of the fittest, which our grandfathers accepted as the immutable law of the jungle. These tenets were by no means unchallenged. Against them and the main currents of the time, worked several agents of change. The teachings of Marx and Morris, the discoveries of the physicists, the researches of the sociologists, and the works of the power engineers. But they had little effect, and the most respectable thought and opinion dominated life in general, and economic life in particular.

The most respectable of our grandfathers held that, in economic matters, private enterprise would adequately cope with all their needs, and that the State had only to abstain from all interference to ensure the best results. According to their economic theories, competition would produce better and cheaper goods and services for the consumers, and would ensure greater efficiency in technical methods of production. Those employers who charged more than the minimum price, or tried to carry on with obsolete methods, would not survive. Profits would go to the most efficient people, and each individual, in seeking his own economic interest, would be furthering the interest of all. The private profit motive would bring about maximum production, because competition would keep profit down to the minimum required to make enterprise worthwhile, and would force every profit-seeker to become as efficient a servant of the consumers as he possibly could.

These principles of laissez-faire were fundamentally capitalist in outlook. The private ownership of capital, that is to say, ownership in the means of production, was taken for granted. Indeed, while the State had as far as possible to keep its hands off in economic matters, there was one form of State intervention which was regarded as being so axiomatic that it did not constitute any interference at all. The State was required to uphold the rights of property, for it was believed that the power of enterprise to fulfil its beneficent work depended on the inviolability of these rights. Under the doctrine of laissez-faire, this form of State intervention was held to involve that the right to acquire property should be open to all, and, as a matter of course, inheritance was also taken for granted.

This economic system appeared perfectly just in its workings in that it gave equal opportunity for all, and rewarded all perfectly according to their deeds. Its rewards were in the form of wages and profits, the former for productive service, the latter for the active employers. In addition, it rewarded the moral service of saving, in the form of interest on invested capital—this, irrespective of whether the individual's earnings were enough to make saving possible. Rent was always rather difficult to fit into this scheme of things, but the classical economists managed the problem by regarding land as a form of capital, interchangeable by purchase and sale with other forms, and by stressing the role of capital in improving the value of the land.

Under these circumstances, large-scale production and greater efficiency did come about. Factory-made goods such as clothing and food tended to become cheaper in relation to average incomes. But to land and buildings the equations of unrestricted competition did not apply, and there was no such trend in the cost of housing and in rent.

The picture is one of aimless and unregulated urban expansion, and of ruthless destruction of the countryside. The degeneration of human environment. While population rapidly increased, industrialism caused it to converge on the centres of industry in vast concentrations. The result was congestion, slums, and reckless speculative expansion over the countryside. We have only to look at our towns to appreciate this picture. From the very beginning they have grown like a cancer with the sole tradition of pioneering individualism. The psychology of the frontier has been inherited by the children and grand-children of the pioneers. The tendency has been for people to move out of the central chaos of the towns and settle on the periphery, where there is more space to satisfy their desire for insulation and elbow room. This is reflected in the outspread suburbs of our towns, in the scattered isolated farmhouses of our rural areas, and in the "pondokkies" of the no-man's-land surrounding our towns, where the poor find temporary respite from the pressure of the slum landlords in the towns.

In the process, whole districts in the inner part of our towns have been blighted, parcelled up, or allowed to decay, to accommodate the lesser effective demand of the lower economic orders. Free competition has failed to provide decent housing not only for the poorest section of the population, but also for the lower middle class. Indeed, so far from meeting the housing problem, unrestricted competition, with the psychology of rugged individualism behind it, has condemned an overwhelming proportion of

the population to the worst sort of environment.

With rising frightfulness the story takes us to the year 1920. This story is the familiar cycle of building expansion, over-production, crash, inactivity, fear, shortage, and higher rents, the increase of urban congestion and inconvenience, and the physical and social erosion of our rural areas. In that year the cumulative effects of the doctrine of laissez-faire on human environment, heightened by the building slump of the Great War period, created a national emergency which could neither be evaded nor postponed.

The people of South Africa were forced to realise that private enterprise, according to the classical laws of supply and demand, had failed to provide housing sufficient for their needs. Hesitantly, because it seemed dangerous to them to admit exceptions to the general freedom of private enterprise, they admitted the necessity of some form of public regulation. Accordingly their Government passed the Housing Act No. 35. By this act, the State was to lend monies at economic rates of interest to local authorities, so that they could carry out housing schemes to meet their needs. Machinery in the form of the Central Housing Board was established to administer the provisions of the Act, and it was hoped that with this minimum amount of State intervention, the problem would somehow be solved.

But from the very beginning the purpose of the South African people was doomed to failure. For in the first place, they regarded the housing problem within the narrowest possible limits. And in the second place, their premises were inadequate for the task in hand. They wanted to provide good housing, on an economic basis, at a price which everyone could pay, without disturbing or even questioning any part of their social-economic system. Instead of setting up a new method of housing, the Government aided and abetted the very process of degeneration in human environment which had created the emergency of 1920.

The policy of the Government was to provide money for economic schemes only. With the psychology of the frontier, and the sentiments of 19th century respectability, it believed in the ideal of secluded privacy and the self-sufficiency of the family, and sanctified the privately owned individual home. It sought to establish a harmless bourgeoisie of property-owners, who, in moving out from the inner quarters of our towns to a better environment on the periphery, would leave room for the lower

economic orders to occupy. This policy was aimed at gradually relieving the shortage of housing and the overcrowding in the towns. By the process of "filtering up"—a euphemistic term which the Central Housing Board has used to describe the torpid movement of our urban and rural populations,—the Government hoped to ease the problem of the slums.

This process failed to gather momentum for the obvious reason that the means of the lower economic orders were far below the rent demanded by the owners of the dwellings that were vacated under the Government's housing policy. Landlords were generally unwilling to accept tenants of the poorest class, and when they did, the result was sub-letting on a large scale, and inevitable overcrowding. Moreover, building costs were so high that only a very limited number of people could afford to pay the price for housing which the local authorities were obliged to charge, whether in the form of instalments, rents, or outright purchase. And in the case of rents, the local authorities had necessarily to give preference to tenants who could be relied on to pay their rent. This meant that in general the first people to obtain rented houses from the local authorities were those who, but for the war and its economic effects, would in all probability have been able to satisfy their housing need themselves without the assistance of the State. In brief, the ratio of rents and building costs steadily increased, while the proportion of population able to pay an economic rent for a new dwelling of minimum decency just as steadily decreased.

The chief causes for this divergent movement of housing costs and incomes were, first, the inherent inability of the capitalist system to raise the wages of the working population and obtain a wider distribution of purchasing power; second, the basis on which the price of land was determined and fixed; and third, the expansion and congestion of our towns.

In the first case, private enterprise, motivated by the expectation of profit, cannot keep the wheels of production turning. As we have seen, the rewards of the laissez-faire economic system fall into two fundamentally distinct parts. One part, in the form of wages, goes to the mass of the population, and this part largely constitutes the costs of production. The other part goes to the capitalists, that is, to the owners of the means of production, in the three forms of rent, interest, and profit. Now production under capitalism cannot be carried on but for the sake of the second part, namely rent, interest, and profit. If production is increased at the expense of the first part, the incentive to produce

is increased. In that event the share of the mass of the population in the goods and services produced decreases, and the goods and services become more difficult to sell. Thus as production is made more profitable, it inevitably becomes less possible, in the absence of outside outlets such as new industries due to technical change, new markets abroad, and new people by the growth of population. The converse of this is true, but if it is made less profitable to produce, then the very motive of production comes to be destroyed. This is the fundamental dilemma of modern capitalism.

In the second case, the price of urban land has almost invariably been the result of something far removed from the orthodox conception of a free market deal. It has hardly ever been achieved by agreement between willing competitive sellers and buyers who are aware of and want the best for the minimum amount of money, and who are not obliged to buy. So far from this being the case, the price of urban land is determined by the most intensive use in the future to which a speculator estimates that he can put the land. His main criterion for judging what the most intensive use would be, is, of course, the evidence around him as to what the lowest standard of space is, that people are putting up with at the moment. Thus the price of urban land is largely determined by the lowest housing standards acceptable. In other words, crowding of the land has been both cause and effect of excessive land prices, which, in turn, have decreased the quality of housing and increased both location and construction costs. A vicious circle of degeneration in our environment.

In the third case, the expansion and congestion of our towns has forced the local authorities to take many expensive remedial steps in the way of providing roads, utilities, and restrictive regulations, all of which have increased the rates and the costs of construction and maintenance, without providing any proportionate increase in convenience, amenity, or living standards.

The net effect of the divergent movement of housing costs and incomes is all too clearly evident in the forms of our towns. They have spread out over the hills, the valleys, and the plains, like a vast military encampment, but without the order that military efficiency requires. And like a cancerous growth they have destroyed the natural beauty of the countryside. Clearly, the Government's housing policy was sooner or later to create another emergency. For by the very nature of this policy and of the social-economic structure in which it was framed, its effects on our environment were bound to be cumulative and not compensating, and could be nothing but disastrous.

Ten years after the passing of the first Housing Act No. 35, the emergency came, and the people of South Africa were forced to the conclusion that the housing problem, like the problems of public health and education, was a public responsibility which, however unwillingly, their Government would have to assume. From 1930 to 1937 there followed a number of Housing Acts, whose most important provision was that the State was empowered to subsidise housing by sub-economic loans to local authorities. This provision was in itself a public admission that the fundamental premises about housing were inadequate, if not wrong, and that the housing policy, based as it was on these premises, had failed to provide a decent environment for the bulk of the South African population. Conscious politics played very little part in bringing about this change. It was simply the outcome of an emergency from which there was no escape.

The position now was that besides the investment of public funds in low-cost housing, which does not in itself imply any outright cost to the State, subsidy, which does involve non-returnable outlay, was to be used to solve the national housing problem. The effect in the first case, we may note, is to reduce financial costs to a minimum, and provide adequate control over the quality of the housing, while in the second case, the effect is to make rentals low enough for the lower economic orders of the population.

By the Elimination of Slums Act No. 53 in 1934, local authorities were given the power and means necessary for dealing with their housing needs. They could buy land or expropriate it for housing purposes; they could build and let dwellings without an intermediary; they could borrow money cheaply from the Housing Loan Fund, they could appropriate subsidies out of the taxes; and they could take over and rebuild slum areas. As in England since 1890, the actual control over the investment of public funds, and permits for State subsidies, was centralised. This control was vested in the Central Housing Board which has to pass all plans eligible for State aid. Moreover, the Government was empowered to give financial assistance through local authorities for the housing of the Aged Poor and Totally Unfit, so that both local authorities and Public Utility Companies could act in this field. Under specified conditions, the Utility Companies could also obtain State aid for economic and sub-economic housing, and by the Additional Housing Act No. 41 in 1937, the Government was empowered to advance

monies, under specified conditions, to approved Building Societies, for the purpose of assisting people to obtain a loan for the construction of a house. Under this Act, the people concerned belong for the most part to the professional class of teachers, lawyers, doctors, etc., and the black-coated class dependent on them.

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These, in brief, are the methods and machinery which the people of South Africa are employing to-day to overcome their housing problem. Since the passing of the first Housing Act in 1920 until December, 1939, the Government has committed itself to provide funds for housing and slum clearance to the extent of some 20 million pounds. But despite this enormous expenditure, it is very clear that the nation's need for housing and a decent environment is far from being satisfied. Indeed, to those who are able to see beyond the horizon of the Government's premises and policy in housing, as in other fields of basic human need, it is clear that not only will the people of South Africa never overcome their problem of housing and environment under the existing conditions, but they will also sink into a deeper slough unless these conditions are changed.

The Central Housing Board has recently recommended that the Government commit itself to a further nine and a quarter million pounds for housing loans to be spread, possibly, over the next six to eight years. But like a great deal of the work of the Central Housing Board, in establishing standards, in supplying information, education, plans, and technical advice, and in conducting experiments in materials and methods, this recommendation has been based on the credos of the paleotechnic age, the age of rising capitalism, the doctrine of laissez-faire, and the psychology of the frontier. The fact is that neither the Central Housing Board nor the Government and the people it serves, has attempted to fit the housing problem into the larger physical and social-economic framework of society, as it must if this problem is to be solved. In the first place their concept of housing is of the old pattern in which the dwelling is little more than a ganglion on a network of interlacing roads, pavements, pipes, and wires. The other basic human requirements, work, recreation, and social life, have somehow to find a place in this network, and, as in the case of housing, their relationship to the town, the countryside, and the region, is barely taken into account. In the second place, house-building as a public enterprise or public works,

is promoted by the Government primarily as a measure to combat the unemployment and stagnation which capitalism creates, and only incidentally with the purpose of satisfying the nation's most urgent needs.

Admittedly, in devoting its enterprise to house production, the Government does supply the people with one of their most urgent needs. But under the present political and social-economic system, there are formidable obstacles in the way of public enterprise devoted to housing or any other useful work. For, in general, it is the monopoly right of private enterprise, whether of the individual, partnership, or joint stock company set-up, to provide for profit the rest of the population, with such goods and services as it gets. Thus if any government, in an effort to promote public enterprise, attempts to satisfy any of the basic needs of the population, it is bound to be very strongly opposed by the group of capitalists whose right it is to provide at a profit for this need.

In South Africa there has been and still is powerful opposition to the Government's housing programme. Politically and economically, this opposition comes from a machine of vested interests built up of private enterprise house-building, rack-renting, and the speculative exploitation of urban land values, etc. All these interests have put obstructions in the way of the Government to prevent it from eliminating the slums. And so far they have largely succeeded in that aim.

The Government's efforts to overcome the housing problem have been nullified, and have created confusion, because they have been based on the linking together of two different and conflicting economies, the one deriving from the principles of production for profit, and the other from the principles of production for use. Private enterprise has been closely interwoven with public enterprise. The position to-day in South Africa is that housing is actually produced, in the physical sense, for profit by private entrepreneurs in the building industry. But these entrepreneurs do not take the initiative in buying land and ordering the houses to be constructed, because the promise of profit is too small. Instead, this initiative, which is the real initiative for the whole act of production, is taken by the local authority, acting according to the policy of the Government, and receiving a Government subsidy. Indeed, the initiative to construct such houses can only be taken by such a public body as the local authority. For, of necessity, the houses must be let at a rent which the displaced slum-dwellers can pay, and there is consequently insufficient profit in the whole proceeding to induce the private

entrepreneur to act.

But the public initiative does not oust the private entrepreneur from the field. In fact, the local authority employs his services, and more than merely allowing him to make his profit at a later stage, it actually enables him to do so. In this way, the obstruction which such a variety of public enterprise meets is not that of the vested interest of active private entrepreneurs in the building industry, whom it may actually benefit very much, but that of the slum landlords, and investors in property, etc.—the passive recipients of rent and interest.

The principle of this system is that the primary initiative is taken by the local authority, using public funds or credit, with the purpose of providing housing to meet the needs of its community, and not of making profit. But the actual physical work of production is let out on contract to profit-seeking entrepreneurs. The same principle can be applied to other durable consumer's goods such as electrical and gas installations in houses, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, etc., and actually has been, as in Johannesburg and Capetown, where such goods are produced upon the same method, and sold upon credit by the local authority to the public.

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Important measures which the Government has taken to stimulate and stabilise housing activity, are the reduction of the rate of interest, and of the rate of rent. But here again the total effects are limited by the anomalies which are inherent in the existing social-economic system of the country. As we have seen, production, under the capitalist economic system, depends entirely on the share of the product that goes to the owners of the means of production, that is, on rent, interest, and profit. Now capitalist production within the limits of the actual physical production of goods and services, is carried on specifically for the sake of profit as against rent and interest. An entrepreneur in the building industry, for example, reckons rent and interest as parts of the cost of production, which have to be paid before a profit can be obtained. The payment of rent and interest therefore, tends to prevent him from producing houses. Reduction of rent and interest, however, lowers his costs, and increases his profits, with the result that he produces more houses.

424 Hence in general, as in this particular instance, production under the capitalist system will be strengthened

by a reduction of the rates of rent and interest and weakened by the reduction of the rate of profit. But as capitalist production as a whole is carried on for the sake of rent and interest, as well as profit, and as the passive recipients of rent and interest—the landlords and financiers,—are closely linked with the active entrepreneurs, the effects of the reduction of the rates of rent and interest cannot but be deceptive, unless the necessity of changing the social-economic system of capitalism is squarely faced.

The Government's measures of reducing the rates of rent and interest are designed to stimulate private enterprise on the one hand, and public enterprise on the other. In the field of housing, where the shortage is great, these measures have a far more stimulating effect on production than in other fields of investment. For the production of houses, which are durable consumers' goods, is subject to far less risk than the production of producers' goods, such as machinery. The bulk of the housing in South Africa is undertaken by public and semi-public bodies, the local authorities, and non-profit making corporations known as Utility Companies, and their programmes are obviously greatly influenced by the rate of interest which they have to pay for their borrowings. These programmes have increased both in number and size during the past five years as a direct result of the lowering of the rates of interest.

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It will now be clear what the Government has done and just how far it has gone to solve the housing problem. It has sought to benefit the mass of the population, both directly and indirectly, at the expense of the rentier and financiers interest, rather than at the expense of the active entrepreneurs, the direct employers of labour. In so doing it has gone as far as is possible within the framework of the class-property-profit system of the South African people. The Government has always been dominated by the central economic and political control of this system. Finance capital. Clearly, unless this control is broken and some form of public financial mechanism substituted for it—a mechanism which is non-profit making and non-capitalist, there can be no hope of achieving housing and a better environment for the mass of the population.

Such a proposal is, of course, alien to the existing social-economic system of South Africa, and even subversive to it. But all those who face the housing problem squarely, are forced to this conclusion. Despite our physical and human resources, and our technical equipment, which far exceed those of all the preceding epochs of western civilisation put together, we have failed to create an environment essential to our psycho-physiological needs. And if we agree that a great civilisation is one which makes the maximum use of its wealth, knowledge, and power, in order to create a social life, then we cannot but judge our own civilisation to be a miserable failure. Our social-economic system, both in theory and in practice, cannot provide us with an environment essential to our basic needs and to our higher functions as cultural beings. Plainly, therefore, we have to find another system which can. Our experience of the past twenty years in housing, to which we may add the experience of every country in the world, leaves us no grounds whatever for assuming that the wheels of our productive machinery will go on turning until our housing problem disappears. Our history of housing shows that this machinery is purely of an emergency nature, designed to meet shifting conditions with as little disturbance as possible to the existing social-economic structure of South African society. But the underlying premises of housing for everyone, and a decent environment for all, are not the premises of production for profit, laissez-faire, the divine right of private property, of capitalism, class-distinction, racialism, nationalism, and of governments striving to preserve old interests, rather than to create new values and higher standards. Germany, under the present Nazi system, is but the most extreme example to date of capitalism acting to preserve itself and to extend its life. As long as this system survives, we may be certain that there will be blight, and slums, and misery in our towns, and physical and social decay in our rural areas. Indeed, these conditions cannot but worsen, because capitalism, in order to go on living, has to resort to ever more desperate measures, which must inevitably lead to war and rapine as the ultimate means of survival.

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Like the Great War, but with greater insistency, the present World War has posed the question of whether we are going to refortify the position of capitalism, or end this system so that we may have a

better civilisation, and a better life for all. It is still rather more than uncertain that the change will be made, for the balance is loaded against the mass of the world's population. But there are certain positive grounds for hope, and the war itself may yet turn the balance in favour of the ill-nourished and ill-housed millions. Already, throughout every country in the world, a large number of people have realised and are coming to realise that there is a better way of doing things, than the haggling small builders, and the miserable parcels of land, and the smug straggling suburbs, and the ideology of individual Home-Ownership, and the psychology of the frontier, must go. And above all, that only governments can make the decisive step and substitute for the prevailing wasteful and obsolete environment, a new environment in keeping with human requirements.

This change cannot be effected unless there is an organised and knowing demand for it, and this demand must come from the ill-nourished, ill-clothed, and ill-housed masses in order to be effective. Here in South Africa there is no such demand. What housing activity we have, is the work of individual groups and scattered idealists, public-spirited officials, technicians, and citizens, and, needless to say, the leaders of labour in industry and agriculture. All credit is due to them for their unstinting and sincere efforts, but such efforts, unfortunately, have been based on old catchwords and shibboleths, which can no longer apply to existing conditions.

That precisely is why the national housing programme, if programme we can call it, has been frustrated and become enshrouded with gloom. Obviously, to lay down a comprehensive programme, and to achieve its fulfilment, the driving force must be stronger than the powers which are resisting these objects. This our Government and many of the best intentioned promoters of housing have assiduously evaded as an issue too complicated and therefore demanding too much faith, and courage, and intelligence, to face. Instead of fostering the demand we have postulated, they have done exactly the opposite and played into the hands of the few who control the lives and destinies of an overwhelming mass of the population, without any responsibility to them.

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The housing that has been produced in this country since the first Housing Act in 1920, and that is being carried out to-day, is for the most part in the nature of legalised built-in slums, or so poorly laid

out and constructed as to constitute incipient slum and blighted areas from the very beginning.

This is indeed a severe criticism to make, but it is amply justified when we consider the means and methods which are at our disposal for creating an environment ordered according to our physical and spiritual needs. What are the means? Our physical and technical resources, and our intelligence to put them to the maximum use for the benefit of every man, woman, and child. What are the methods? The methods of planning,—architecture, urbanism, and regionalism. These disciplines are the outcome of man's struggle to gain the mastery of his world and of the forces of nature inimical to his life. From the dawn of history, architecture, urbanism, regionalism (planning), have been resorted to by him in some form best suited to his aims, and invariably they have enriched his life, and raised it to a higher level. Examples are legion throughout history. Here it is sufficient to recall the architecture and the planned cities of ancient Greece and Rome, of the Middle Ages, and of the Renaissance, as demonstrations of this fact.

With the tremendous advance of knowledge during the last three hundred years, architecture, urbanism and regionalism have in our day become a science. The science of organising human environment, ordering it according to human needs, and improving its order so that human life may ascend progressively to higher and higher planes. The conception of planning, and in particular of architecture, urbanism, and regionalism, remains however, so far vague and ambiguous, not only in the minds of lay people who have been confronted by it, but unfortunately also among planners and would-be planners. Until this conception, and the doctrine of planning are understood and carried out in practice, in their entirety, there can be no solution, or any hope of a solution for the problem of human environment.

Our task to-day is not merely the provision of housing in order to satisfy the needs of the nation. It is far more complicated and far more onerous than that. We have to reclaim our wastelands, and eroded lands, and turn them into public assets. We have to improve our poor lands and make them fit for human occupation. We have to do away with our blighted areas in the towns and in the countryside, our agglomerations of towns, our rotten industrial areas, our socially degenerate lands, and make them productive, culturally as well as materially. In a word, we have to reconstruct our whole environment to provide a better, fuller life for all.

428 These problems, these tasks, cannot be tackled and disposed of one by one, and independent of the

rest. They are each part of the whole problem of environment, and therefore, each part of a unified process. That process is the architectural discipline of urbanism and regionalism. Its first postulate is a Plan. A comprehensive master plan based on the real and urgent needs of the people. Its second postulate is freedom to carry out the plan, and its third postulate, which follows automatically from the second, is freedom to improve and perfect the plan, and the work based on the plan.

In the first place, therefore, we have to state the problem of environment fairly and squarely in all its aspects, physical, economic, social and political, and establish a programme that embraces all of these aspects. This would entail a systematic and precise survey and study of:—

1. The geographical and topographical conditions of the country—the climate, the soil, the subsoil, the products of the soil, orientation, prevailing winds, seasons of rain, etc., and the possibilities of ameliorating these conditions.
2. The resource base of the country, both natural and artificial, and methods of maintaining it.
3. The industries of the country, their organisation and distribution.
4. The transport and communication system of the country—roads, railways, harbours, airways, pipelines, power-lines, etc., both existing and projected.
5. Natural recreation areas and historic places, their preservation and the creation of new ones.
6. Housing zones, their relation to the zones of agricultural and industrial production and to the principal approaches of the town; the insulation of housing zones by means of open areas; the limitation and allocation of land for housing purposes, the treatment of that land, and the conservation and improvement of existing natural beauties.
7. The real and urgent needs of the people.
8. The administrative system of the country.

In the second place, we have to establish a general system of laws for the country which will enforce the principles of the master plan, and enable it to be realised and carried towards perfection. Such laws would be drafted with due regard for current economic changes and new possibilities, always holding the welfare of the human being to be the principal object of urbanism and regionalism. It follows that once the master plan has been established, and the realisation of it ensured by a general system of laws, every detailed plan of the parts that together constitute human environment would

have to fit into the general scheme laid down in the master plan.

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Consider now the major implications of these disciplines, architecture, urbanism and regionalism, in the light of the most comprehensive technical researches of the past twenty years.

1. The best type of dwelling, as of any other product, is produced by the best methods available at any given time. This is no less true of to-day than it is of the Terremare Age and its lake-dwelling, the Mycenaean Age and its "megaron," or the Graeco-Roman Age and its "domus." The best methods in use to-day are unquestionably those of industrial organisation, technique, and administration. Therefore, housing, and building in general, must be industrialised. Under existing conditions, building operations are carried out as in the past, in the open air, at the mercy of the seasons and inclement weather. For this reason the building industry is less productive than other industries. The industrialisation of building means that most of the constructional elements of building would be made in the factory, transported to the building site, and assembled there. Thus it would be necessary to reduce as far as possible the number of "trades," and replace the principal "trades" with a single one which would perform the task of assembling the factory-made elements of building. The production of housing and buildings in general, by the industrial method, requires standardisation before this method can be applied. Standardisation not of house and building types, but of the elements of houses and buildings. The reciprocal effect on industry of this change in the methods of the production of housing would be to provide industry with a programme based on the real and urgent needs of the people. Such a programme would be no less than the equipment of the towns, the countryside, and the whole country, a task so immense that only the Government could undertake it successfully.

2. The expansion of our towns in the form of so-called garden suburbs, is bringing about economic and social chaos. These garden suburbs are scattering the people to the four winds, and depriving them of their collective power. At the same time, this type of expansion is costing so much in transport systems, roads, and services, that it is a heavy burden on the economy of the people, heaviest, of course, on the lower economic orders of the population. The density of the centres of our towns must therefore be increased, the open spaces increased, and the distances that have to be traversed,

decreased. This means that the centres of our towns must be constructed vertically, that is, in the form of multi-storeyed buildings, set in parks. The dark, noisy, dusty, corridor streets that we know to-day, must be eliminated, and pedestrian traffic separated from high-speed traffic. The urban dwellings must be built away from the streets and surrounded by parks which would serve as the recreation areas of the town. All this is possible, for our technical equipment and our resources are more than equal to the task.

3. The Rights of Man, the Freedom of the Individual, magnificent abstractions of the 18th century, have been converted into strictly limited realities. They have been codified to mean on the one hand, the right of individuals to acquire, own, and dispose of property for their own private benefit, and on the other hand, non-interference with these property rights. This code exists to-day, and is the greatest obstruction to any work directed towards the freedom of the individual, creative enthusiasm, civic faith, collective action, and public welfare.

Now Rousseau admitted the principle of individual private property. But he was careful to qualify this principle by giving it the double function of benefit and obligation. To him, private property was "that which a man can cultivate and work." To-day land is owned but not worked or put to useful purposes, and the law of private landed property which makes this state of affairs possible, is the most incontestable of all our laws. The effect of this law has been to weld together into an inert mass a multitude of private interests, independent of, and indifferent to one another, and above all, despotic. The law of private landed property has ossified the land. We have therefore to recognise the fact that land is only worth the services it can render. We have to free the land, and mobilise it for the public welfare. Land which is vested in the people as a whole, and used by them according to a plan based on their communal needs, is of real value, because it brings greater benefits to all. Instead of the law of private landed property we have to establish a new law which will permit the fundamental value of land to be fixed, and the distribution of surplus values brought about by works of common interest, to be determined, as between the private owners of land which appreciates in value due to public works, and the people who bear the cost of public works. The economic basis of this law is the recovery of surplus values for the benefit of all the people.

4. The public services, sewerage, water, gas, electricity, the telephone, the transport systems, have

resulted from housing. Consequently housing must be laid out in functional harmony with the public services,—as an extension of them. The question is not how much public services are to interfere with housing. The basis of the problem is the liberty of the individual, and the problem is to assure that liberty as far as possible. Alone, the individual is weak and ineffectual. In the group he acquires immense power. The problem, therefore, is to establish and maintain equilibrium between the individual and the society of which he is a member, so that everyone may enjoy the maximum of freedom. That, in fact, is the touchstone of the architectural disciplines, urbanism, and regionalism.

Clearly now, all the implications of modern architecture, urbanism, and regionalism, demand change in every department of South African life. They demand change in our aims and purposes, our customs, habits, and laws, our methods of work and administration, our criteria for investing capital, and our anticipation of results and returns. The advance of knowledge, and the technical inventions of the 19th and 20th century have profoundly and violently altered human life and the course of human life. They have revolutionised our world in every sphere of human activity, and everywhere, social life to-day is in a state of revolution. The only way of overcoming this state of revolution, this impasse in social life, is with revolutionary solutions. Revolutionary solutions, however, can only be achieved on the basis of a doctrine, and a doctrine must be based on existing facts. The new doctrine we have been discussing, the doctrine of architecture, urbanism, regionalism (planning), that we are proposing as our line of action for rebuilding our environment, and providing through our environment a better, fuller life for all, is firmly based on two central facts. 1. The evolution of the machine, and the revolution it has caused in the life of the human being. And 2. The revolt of the human conscience.

It must be clear that Regionalism recognises no arbitrary territorial limits such as the political boundaries that we know to-day and are hard put to keep track of. Nor does it recognise politics as anything but the execution of a plan, a master plan, which has been formulated according to real limits as determined by the natural and biological conditions that influence the countries of the world. In short, Regionalism is not only opposed to nationalism, but renders it impossible to exist, and so destroys

the very seeds of war. This idea, and the doctrine of regionalism or planning on which it rests have nothing to do with the ideologies of "isms." They derive from the humanistic approach, the scientific approach, to the problem of modern life in its entirety, and are purely and simply human.



The need for planning our environment has to some extent been realised by the people of South Africa. We have various Acts and Ordinances to enable planning, but the promises of this legislation, and the machinery for planning are so limited that it will be impossible to change and improve our environment unless these measures are lifted from their present position as stopgaps into a realistic and long-range programme.

We have local Town-planning agencies in the Provinces, with the notable exception of the Orange Free State. We have a national programme for roads, and for natural recreation areas—the conservation of our flora and fauna. But we have no national planning authority, no central controlling body, such as exists in the United States of America, for co-ordinating these activities, for relating them to all the other aspects of urbanism and regionalism, and for directing the research that must be made, and the initiative that must be taken, so that a comprehensive master plan and planning policy can be established for the nation.

Existing official plans are partial and too often false solutions to our regional and urban problems, because they are not based on a knowledge of the real problems. These plans are for the most part in accord with the economic principles and financial set-ups in use to-day, and are thus rendered ineffectual in resolving the great problems that our towns and rural areas are posing for us. Plans cannot be formulated on the basis of existing municipal and administrative limitations. We have to establish the real limitations, and in order to do so, we have to tackle the problem of South African life in all its magnitude.

It is our indispensable obligation, therefore, to create in this country a national planning authority of high personality, competence, and responsibility, capable of directing our efforts and energies towards the achievement of an environment in keeping with our material and spiritual needs. Under existing

conditions, authority, both local and central, has no time to consider its problems properly, and despite its manifest desire to renovate our urban and rural environment, it lacks the necessary knowledge to do so. This knowledge is gained only by disinterested research and experiment. Without it, there can be no real progress. Authority in this country is not acquainted with the new thought in architecture, urbanism, and regionalism, that offers the solution to the problem of housing and the problem of human environment—indeed, the only solution for this problem. And those whom authority consults and who determine the spirit of its enterprises, are either ignorant of the methods of modern architecture, urbanism, and regionalism, or ignore their existence. This is no criticism of authority, for those in authority are conscientious, industrious, capable, ingenious people. But they are in an inextricable situation. There is no doctrine of planning to guide them, and no superior authority to direct them and assist them in their work.

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To-day we organise for war, and mobilise all our resources, material and human, for achieving our object—destruction. To this end we have created a Directorate-General of War Supplies for directing our war effort. Can we not just as easily elect to mobilise and act for the achievement of peace by way of rebuilding our environment according to our real and urgent needs?

This problem of housing, of environment, is neither contemporary, nor local. It is a world issue, a human issue, that requires world collaboration, world co-operation, world action, and the universal recognition of the dignity and liberty of the individual human being. The break-down of modern society is manifest in the degeneration of its housing, in the blight and chaos of its cities, in the waste and erosion of its lands. The life of the individual human being is at stake. To save that life, and rescue society in its crisis, we have to produce housing, regenerate our cities, reclaim our lands, and equip our countries on the basis of a plan, a World Plan, which is itself based on the psycho-physiological needs of the human being. Our struggle to-day is for the achievement of unity, and that is our programme for achieving it, in this our age of the machine.

The time has come for us to realise that if planning is to bring about the liberation of the forces of production, then it must be directed by an authority whose aim is plenty, and not by one which is dominated by the principles of production for profit. Planning, as it is known in South Africa to-day, means no more than external public control,—State interference in the capitalist economy of the country. But this is not planning in the sense of aiming for and securing plenty. For such planning involves disinterested operation of industry, or rather consumer-interested control. Planning in which each industry or service in the country is regarded as an independent self-contained unit, and unified as a separate unit (which is what we have in South Africa to-day) is no planning at all. If the real and urgent needs of the people are to be satisfied then we must have inter-industrial planning. This means that each industrial authority must work to a master plan formulated by a co-ordinating super-authority for industry as a whole.

If our production is to be brought into line with our real social needs, it is not enough merely to tinker with the existing capitalist economic system. The system must be changed. For under capitalism, private gain, and not the needs of the human being, is the motive of production. But under a planned system of production, collectively controlled, there is no limit to the extent to which our real needs can be satisfied short of the definite limit set by the extent of our productive power. The transformation from the system of production for profit, Capitalism, to the system of production for use, Planning, can be made by pacific, constitutional means, for we have already in South Africa, expedients which we have adopted in our emergencies, and which have some appearance of planning in this or that particular field. It would be no great strain on the people of South Africa to embark on comprehensive planning. Indeed our emergency to-day is such that only comprehensive planning will enable us to fend off or reduce the dangers that lurk on every hand.

We are in the presence of immense new occasions, and have to be bold and resolute in facing them. But up to now we have been pitifully timid, and blindly credulous of and confident in the working assumptions of the past. There is an old Stoic proverb which holds that men are tormented by their opinions of things, rather than by the things themselves, and this is true of most of our worst problems to-day. We have unprecedented power to create a far better world than the one we find ourselves in, but we lack the attitude of mind that is necessary in order to cope with the unprecedented conditions

we have to deal with. We have to reconsider a great part of our assumptions about man and his relations to his fellow beings, and to the cosmos which brought him into being, for these assumptions have come down to us from previous generations who lived in far other conditions and possessed far less knowledge than we do about the world and themselves.

In seeking to restore equilibrium to society at large by examining the foundations on which it rests, we are not encouraging and engaging in any hasty readjustment. Equilibrium cannot be achieved unless we do examine the facts, freshly, critically, and dispassionately, as did the men who began the great work in experimental science.

The origin, development, and future promotion of civilisation are badly understood and misconceived, and our education for citizenship aims at preparing us and the coming generation for the old traditional citizenship which has so far failed to eliminate the tremendous dangers and crying injustices of our social and political life. With the simplicity and innocence of rabbits, we take everything for granted,—our electricity, our trains, and motor cars, and aeroplanes, our telephones and radios, our cinemas, and books and newspapers, our moral code and standards of manners, and our national constitution. But we do not feel any obligation to make the least contribution ourselves to the life and world of our times. Indeed we go out of our way to discourage creative thought and discredit those who puzzle us with disturbing criticisms and invite us to change our ways. Endowed as we are with intelligence, it should be our pride to revise our ideas and change our life and environment, and not to abide by what passes for respectable opinion and conduct. For such opinion and conduct can frequently be shown to be not respectable at all.

Our straggling overcrowded towns, and our rundown rural areas have brought to the forefront of our thoughts and activities, the importance of the common man, and science has demonstrated that we are living on a far lower plane of intelligent conduct and rational enjoyment than is necessary. We who would change this order and raise the status of the common man to its proper level are constantly charged with advocating the violent overthrow of government, or with working for the abolition of private property or the family, without having anything to put in their place. But such accusations brought against large groups or individuals must be cautiously dealt with. For history teaches that it has always been the custom to charge those who happened to be unpopular with holding beliefs and

doing things which they neither believed nor did. Socrates, we have to remember, was executed for corrupting youth and infidelity to the gods, and Jesus for proposing to overthrow the government. "Good sense," wrote Descartes, "is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed; for everyone thinks himself so abundantly provided with it that those even who are the most difficult to satisfy in everything else, do not usually desire a larger measure of this quality than they already possess." That precisely is why our life is in tumult, and our world in confusion to-day.

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We have productive power, knowledge, equipment, and organisation, unprecedented in the history of man. But we utilise them for making money, Big Business, and war. On the other hand we have vital material and spiritual needs, and the task of satisfying them. This task, as we have seen, is immense and urgent. We, the people of the machine age, have to produce housing, regenerate our towns, reclaim our lands, and equip our countries. We have to rebuild our whole environment in accordance with our needs and functions as thinking, feeling, creating, beings. The question before us now is whether we are going to accept the challenge of this task and undertake it, so that we may live, or evade the issue, as we have done hitherto, and destroy ourselves in barbarism and war: whether we are going to divert the enormous energy we put into making battleships, bombers, tanks, and guns, and the enthusiasm and vigour we put into our Rugby matches and other sporting competitions, to the production of housing and a new environment: in fine, whether we are going to have Housing or Holocaust.

A MOBILE EXHIBITION UNIT

The Department of Education intends to plan an Exhibition demonstrating the new spirit which prevails in Architecture Painting and Sculpture. Since the object of this mobile Exhibition will be to awaken interest in these subjects throughout South Africa, it is intended that the Exhibition will be shown not only in the large centres but also in as many small towns as practicable.

The total exhibit when erected should cover a ground area not exceeding 3,500 square feet, and in view of economical considerations it is suggested that two levels are not exceeded. The construction of the unit should be such as to make ready assembly and dismantling feasible.

Architects should show clearly the general treatment proposed with regard to treatment of vertical and horizontal surfaces, and the disposition of the various elements of exhibition. It is suggested broadly that a number of models and photographs should form the nucleus of the Architectural section and the buildings it is proposed to demonstrate should be indicated. The authorities have been fortunate in obtaining a representative collection of paintings by: Picasso, Braque, Gris, Leger and Helion. The average size of canvas is 4 ft. 0 in. by 3 ft. 0 in. In the Sculpture exhibit Laurens, Lipchitz and Brancusi are among the sculptors whose works have been obtained for the Exhibition.

DRAWINGS REQUIRED:

Key plans and sections to illustrate the scheme fully.

Interior perspective or hollow isometric.

General exterior view.

Details of typical construction.

Notes on materials.

A MOBILE ART PAVILION FOR THE DEPT. OF EDUCATION

1940—AUGUST.

THOMSEN—HOPE.

STATEMENT:

An architectural setting was required for paintings, sculptures and architectural models illustrating the contemporary art movement. The Solution should facilitate the exhibition of the collection throughout the country.

ARGUMENT:

An analysis of the Problem revealed two major difficulties:

(1) Transport.

(2) Construction.

Two means of transport were available:—

(a) By Rail.

(b) By Road.

The difficulty of packing the contents of the Exhibition into various railway trucks, unloading them at the different country stations and transporting them to and from the various sites in local vehicles, led to the adoption of the alternative means. As a result, a motor Caravan consisting of:—

2 powered caravans.

1 covered caravan (no motor).

2 24 ft. 0 in. lorries.

3 22 ft. 0 in. trailers.

is incorporated in the Solution.

A flexible method of construction was necessary. 8 ft. by 4 in. T-section stanchions for the sides and a canvas roof was considered satisfactory. The stanchions are of a length suitable for transport on 22 ft. 0 in. trailers. The canvas roof is laid on a system of cross meshed steel wires kept in tension by hawsers affixed to iron stays.

Planning . . .

The educational purpose of the project has been accepted and emphasised in the Solution. The contemporary spirit is simply defined in the Prologue, and visually explained by means of the architectural, sculptural and painting examples that follow. The Epilogue reviews the exhibition in the light of the Prologue definition—affording an area for adjustment and contemplation.

Full use is made of vistas and balconies to enhance the sculpture theme piece of the collection.

The problem of arranging the vehicles is solved by utilising them as platforms, the varying levels forming part of the design.

Services . . .

When in small country towns, the exhibition staff may make use of the three roomed flat unit formed by the two motor caravans and the covered trailer.

The suggested arrangement of the exhibits is presented in the form of the Exhibition Catalogue.

A.M.T., R.E.G.H.

1

ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITS.

SOUTH AFRICA.

1. Aiton Court. Johannesburg.
Photos and Sketches.
2. House Stern. Johannesburg.
Photos and Sketches.
3. House Harris. Johannesburg.
Model and Notes.

INTERNATIONAL.

4. Bauhaus at Dessau.
Architect, Walter Gropius.
Model and Sketches.
5. Private Zoo. Near London. England.
Architects, Tecton Group.
Photo-Mural.
6. Technical School. Palestine.
Architect, Eric Mendelsohn.
Photos and Sketches.

2

7. Berlin Exhibition House.
Architect, Mies van der Rohe.
Model.

8. Swiss Pavilion. Paris.
Architect, Le Corbusier.
Model.

9. School. America.
Architect, Richard Neutra.
Sketches and Photos.

ASPECT.

Mobile and Exhibition Architecture.

10. Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux a L'Exposition de 1937.
Architect, Le Corbusier.
Photos and Sketches.
11. Swedish Pavilion. New York Worlds Fair.
Photos.
12. Mobile Art Gallery. This structure attempts to point to what can be achieved by the architect to-day.

3

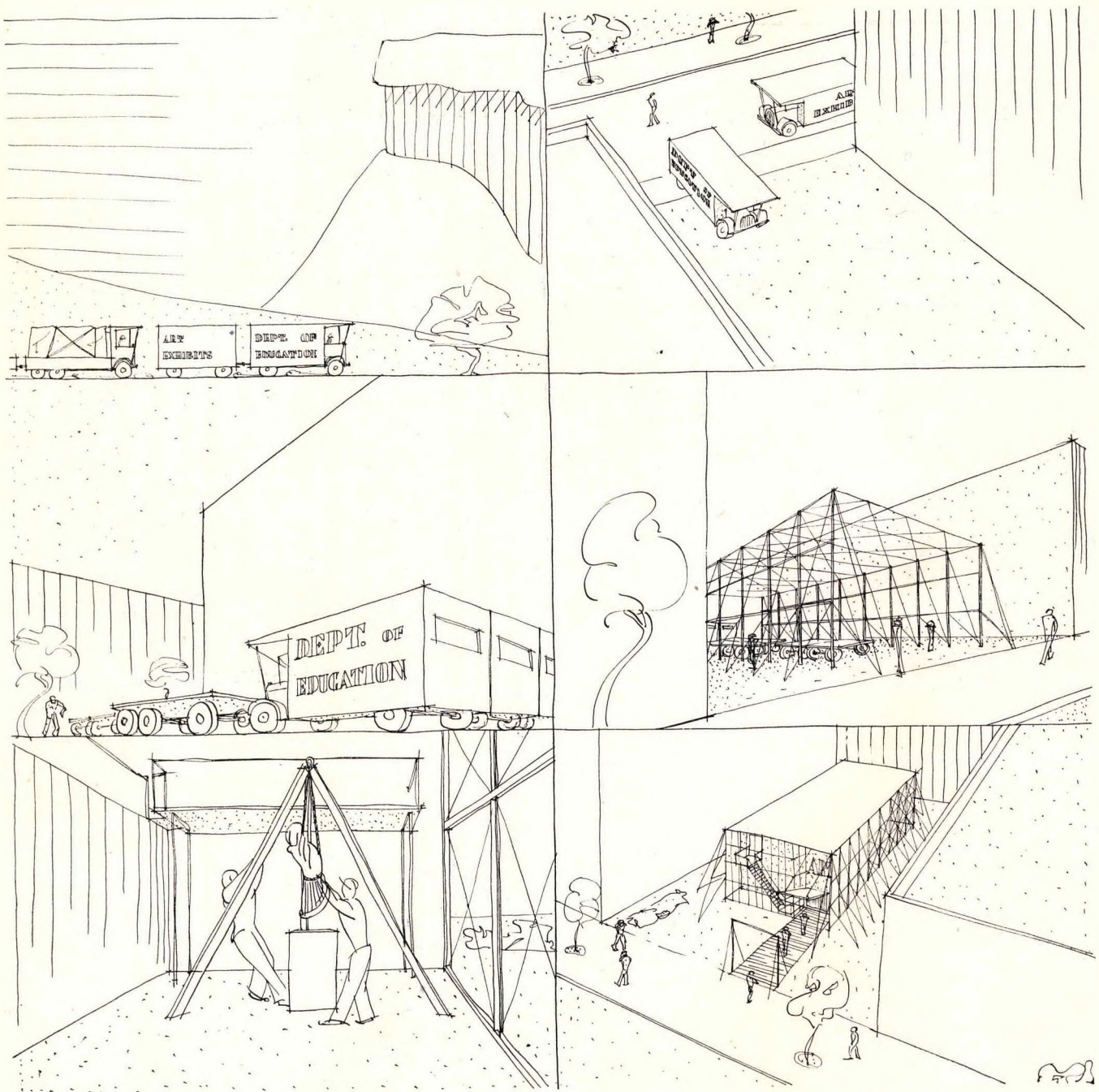
SCULPTURE EXHIBITS.

1. Theme Piece.
Zadkine.
Torso in stone.
2. Small Table Exhibits.
(a) Brancusi. C.
Sculpture Mobile. Polished Bronze.
(b) Bird in Space.
(c) Maholy-Nagy.
Moving sculpture in metal and glass.
(d) Picasso. P.
Head. Stone.
(e) Laurens. Henri.
Guitar. Caste Stone. 1920.
3. Warren Cheney.
Mother and Child.
4. Ivan Mestrovic.
"The Archers of Domorgoi." Wood carving.
5. Jacques Lipchitz.
Reclining woman with guitar.

4

PAINTING EXHIBITS.

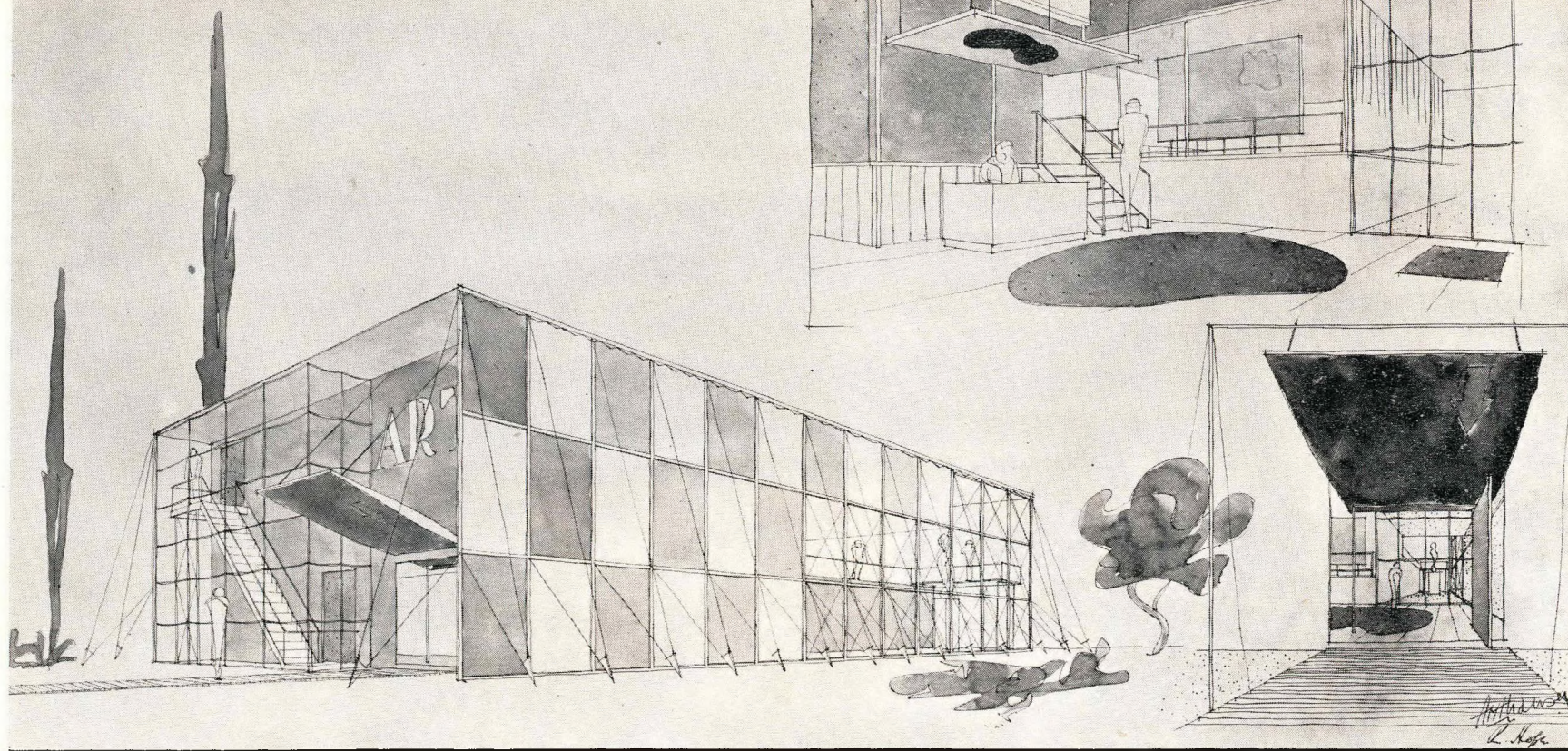
1. Braque. G.
Seaport.
2. Picasso. P.
The painter and his Model. 1928.
3. Leger. F.
Nature Morte. 1928.
Etude Pour la Pause. 1929.
4. Le Corbusier.
Abstract. 1932.
5. Gris. J.
Composition. 1914.
6. Ozenfant. Amédée.
Still Life. 1927.
7. Rivera. Diego.
The Telegraph Pole. Oil.
Still Life. Oil. 1917.



THOMSEN—HOPE

MOBILE ART

PERSPECTIVES.



MOBILE ART



South African Permanent
Mutual Building & Investment
Society Johannesburg.

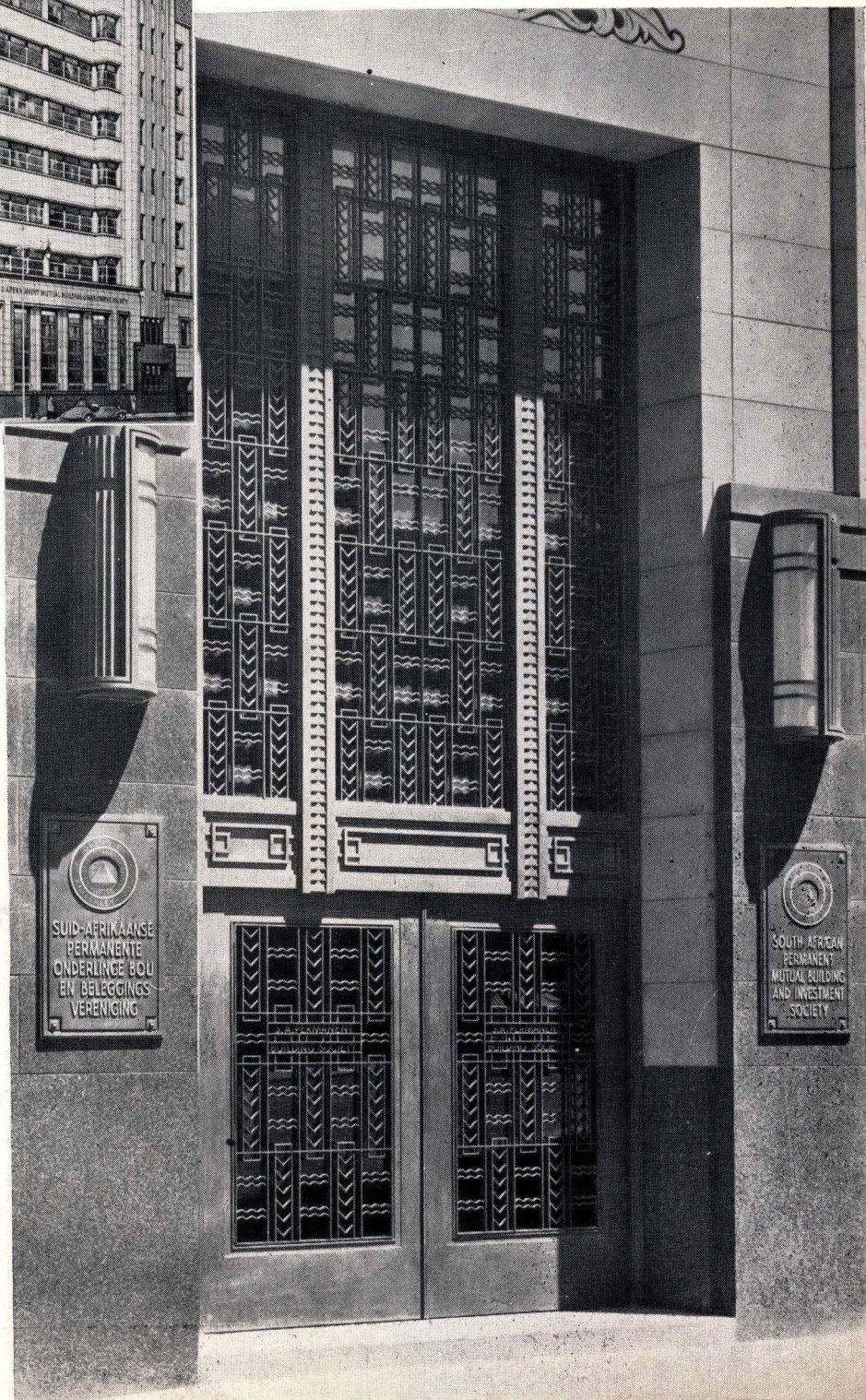
The whole of the Bronze
Metal Grilles to the Main
Entrance, Bronze Light
Fittings and Name Panels
flanking the Main Entrance,
Facia Letters, Indicator
Boards, etc., were fabricated
in Johannesburg

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Journal of the SA Architectural Institute

PUBLISHER:

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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