

The City Club of N. Y.
January 25, 1974

THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK CITY (II)
AN AGENDA FOR ACTION

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GOOD AFTERNOON,

THE LAST TIME I SPOKE ON "THE FUTURE OF NEW YORK" A MONTH OR SO AGO, THE NEW YORK TIMES REPRINTED LARGE EXCERPTS WHICH RESULTED IN AN UNEXPECTED FLOOD OF LETTERS. MOST OF THEM, OF COURSE, WERE DIRECTED TO THE ISSUES RAISED; BUT ONE ANONYMOUS NOTE MERELY POINTED OUT THAT SECTION 899 OF NEW YORK'S CRIMINAL CODE EXPRESSLY OPENS TO FINE OR IMPRISONMENT "PERSONS PRETENDING TO FORECAST THE FUTURE".

LEST THERE BE A CITY MARSHALL PRESENT, I WOULD LIKE, WITH YOUR PERMISSION, TO GO A STEP PAST THE QUESTION OF THE CITY'S PROBABLE FUTURE, AND TO DISCUSS THE BROAD OUTLINE OF AN AGENDA THAT MIGHT HELP TO GET US THERE A BIT FASTER AND SOMEWHAT MORE PAINLESSLY.

LOOKING DISPASSIONATELY AT THE RELEVANT STATISTICS AND PLOTTING THE TRENDS, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT, TO MAYOR BEAME'S GOOD FORTUNE, NEW YORK CITY IS AT (OR APPROACHING) WHAT THE ANCIENT GREEKS CALLED A "PERIPETEIA", A SUDDEN REVERSAL OF CIRCUMSTANCES ON WHICH THE PLOT OF A DRAMA HINGES.

IN THE 1960'S, DUE TO DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES, "THE DECK WAS STACKED" AGAINST THE MAYOR OF ANY OF THE LARGER, OLDER CENTRAL CITIES - FORCES BEYOND HIS CONTROL WERE ERODING HIS TAX BASE, DRIVING A HEALTHY FRACTION OF HIS MIDDLE CLASS PUBLIC TO THE SUBURBS AND SWAMPING HIS INNER CITY CORE WITH RURAL DISFUNCTIONAL POOR. SOARING CRIME RATES, PLUMMETING READING SCORES AND SOCIAL UNREST, APPARENT TO EVERYONE, IN TIME DROVE EVEN SUCH EXCEPTIONALLY ABLE AND ENERGETIC MEN AS MAYOR CAVANAUGH IN DETROIT AND MAYOR LEE IN NEW HAVEN TO ADMIT DEFEAT.

IN NEW YORK CITY, THE BIGGEST AND BEST, THE SENSE OF DETERIORATION WAS MAGNIFIED BY THE SHEER NUMBERS INVOLVED, AND KNOWLEDGABLE OBSERVERS DEBATED SUCH QUESTIONS AS "IS THE CITY GOVERNABLE", OR "CAN OUR CITIES SURVIVE".

BUT, MANY WOUNDS ARE, AS DOCTORS SAY, "SELF-LIMITING". FOR ONE THING, THE MASSIVE SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS OF THE 1960's, ALTHOUGH MORE COSTLY AND MORE TIME-CONSUMING THAN ANYONE IMAGINED, FINALLY DID START TO SHOW RESULTS, AS A GROWING PORTION OF THE RURAL SOUTHERN POOR "UNDERCLASS" DID SLOWLY BEGIN TO ADOPT MIDDLE CLASS LIFE STYLES. FOR ANOTHER, THE TAX RATABLES AND MIDDLE CLASS TYPES THE SUBURBS AND EXURBS RECEIVED SOON BROUGHT IN THEIR WAKE POLLUTION,

CONGESTION, NEW BOND ISSUES AND UNFORESEEN SOCIAL PROBLEMS. IN TIME, DISCUSSIONS OF SUBURBAN LIFE BEGAN TO ECHO WITH PHRASES SUCH AS "CRACKS IN THE PICTURE WINDOW", "TROUBLE IN PARADISE" AND "GILDED GHETTO", AS DISILLUSION BEGAN FINALLY TO SET IN.

1973 IS DESTINED TO BE KNOWN, AMONG OTHER THINGS, AS THE YEAR "GREENWICH SAID THANKS, BUT NO THANKS, TO THE CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS OF XEROX", OR THE YEAR CALIFORNIA, COLORADO AND VERMONT EACH SAID, IN EFFECT, "WE ARE A NICE PLACE TO VISIT BUT PLEASE DON'T LIVE HERE". 1973 WILL ALSO BE KNOWN AS THE YEAR WHEN, IN NEW YORK'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS, RELATIVE READING SCORES FINALLY ENDED THEIR LONG DECLINE AND BEGAN PERCEPTIBLY TO HEAD UPWARD AGAIN; IT WILL BE THE YEAR WHEN THE RATES OF VARIOUS FORMS OF CRIME FINALLY STARTED TO GO DOWN (DOWN, THAT IS) ALONG WITH THE NUMBER OF NEW WELFARE REGISTRATIONS AND THE LENGTH OF ONE'S WAIT FOR A NEW YORK CITY HOSPITAL BED.

1973 WILL ALSO BE KNOWN AS THE YEAR WHEN AMERICA RE-DISCOVERED MASS TRANSIT, AND THE YEAR WHEN THE ENERGY CRISIS TOOK MUCH OF THE BLOOM OFF THE SUBURBAN AND EXURBAN ROSE.

UNFORTUNATELY, 1973 WILL ALSO BE KNOWN AS THE YEAR WHEN THE URBAN MONEY-TREE GREW BARE, WHEN THE DRASTIC INCREASES IN FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS TO THE CITIES BEGAN TO LEVEL OFF, AND WHEN A GROWING NUMBER OF VOICES WERE HEARD DEMANDING BETTER DELIVERY OF CITY SERVICES FOR FEWER, RATHER THAN MORE, DOLLARS.

IF, THEN, THIS IS AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF THE PROSPECTS FOR NEW YORK TODAY - A LEVELLING OFF OF INDICATIONS OF DECLINE AND SOME HOPEFUL SIGNS OF TURN-AROUND, ON THE ONE HAND, AND A TIGHTENING OF FEDERAL AND STATE PURSE-STRINGS ON THE OTHER - WHAT COURSES OF FEASIBLE ACTION ARE TO BE RECOMMENDED?

HONORABLE, INTELLIGENT MEN CAN DISAGREE, AND ANYONE'S DETERMINATIONS OF WHAT'S DESIRABLE, WHAT'S FEASIBLE AND WHAT MERITS HIGHEST PRIORITY ARE SUBJECT TO FAIR DISPUTE.

MY OWN LIST OF GOALS FOR THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION IS NOT MEANT TO BE EITHER EXHAUSTIVE OR OVERLY DETAILED, BUT RATHER, IS MEANT TO INDICATE SIX MAJOR, BASIC POSITIONS I FEEL MAYOR BEAME'S ADMINISTRATION WOULD DO WELL TO TAKE.

THEY DEAL ESSENTIALLY WITH THE GOALS OF A) INCREASING INCOME; B) GETTING GREATER VALUE FROM PRESENT EXPENDITURES; C) EASING UNNECESSARY STRAINS ON THE SOCIAL FABRIC.

THEY ARE:

- 1) A CONTINUATION OF THE ROLE OF NEW YORK'S MAYOR AS THE MAJOR NATIONAL "VOICE OF THE CITIES", IN PARTICULAR SPEARING THE DRIVE TO SHIFT THE TOTAL FINANCIAL BURDEN OF WELFARE TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND OF EDUCATION TO THE STATE;
- 2) AN INTENSIFIED "COST/BENEFIT", SYSTEMS ANALYSIS APPROACH TO THE OPERATIONS OF CITY GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, WITH SOPHISTICATED "RAND-TYPE" RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS AIMED AT A DRAMATIC INCREASE IN THE EFFECTIVENESS IN DELIVERY SYSTEMS OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES;
- 3) AN IMAGINATIVE, VIGOROUS EFFORT TO USE VOLUNTARY SERVICE AND PROVEN PHILANTHROPIC GROUPS AS SOCIAL WELFARE AGENTS OF THE CITY. THE GENERAL THEME COULD BE "HELPING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES";
- 4) A TWO-PHASED THRUST AT MIDDLE CLASS "PSYCHE-BUILDING" FOR THE LOWEST CLASS DISFUNCTIONAL POOR AND OF "AMENITY CREATION" FOR THE MIDDLE CLASSES;
- 5) A SINCERE AND BONA FIDE EFFORT AT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MUNICIPAL "OMBUDSMAN" OFFICE FOR NEW YORK, NOT FOR POLITICAL ADVANTAGE OR PATRONAGE, BUT TRULY ALONG THE LINES OF THE SUCCESSFUL SCANDINAVIAN MODEL; AND
- 6) AN IMAGINATIVE AND VIGOROUS EFFORT TO DEAL, NOT WITH

THE POLICE, NOT WITH THE COURTS, NOT WITH THE CORRECTION SYSTEM, BUT WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AS AN INTEGRATED, COORDINATED WHOLE.

AREN'T THERE MORE AREAS OF CONCERN? YES, HAVEN'T YOU MORE DETAILED SPECIFICS? YES. WHY NOT ENUMERATE THEM? BECAUSE THE LONGER AND MORE DETAILED THE LIST, THE LESS THE POSSIBILITY OF THOUGHTFUL, INFORMED DEBATE; THE LESS THE CHANCE OF REALISTIC CONSIDERATION OF ANY OF THEM; THE LESS THE CHANCE OF IMPLEMENTATION.

THIS SIX-POINT PROGRAM FOCUSES ON THE AREAS OF GREATEST POSSIBLE EFFECTIVE ACTION. MODEST EXPENDITURES COULD RESULT IN BENEFITS OUT OF ALL PROPORTION TO THE EFFORT AND DOLLARS INVOLVED.

THE CITY IS IN THE PROCESS OF "TURNING AROUND"; EFFECTIVE ACTION COULD SPEED THE PROCESS CONSIDERABLY. NONE OF US HAS ANY PATENT ON IDEAS, ANY MONOPOLY ON BRAINS OR EXPERIENCE. NOTHING BUT GOOD CAN COME FROM LIVELY, INFORMED DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE APPROACHES⁵ TO OUR PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS.

WHEN CLEMENCEAU COMMENTED THAT "WAR IS TOO IMPORTANT TO BE LEFT ONLY TO THE GENERALS", HE COULD AS WELL HAVE REFERRED TO MEDECINE AND DOCTORS, EDUCATION AND TEACHERS, AND SO ON.

EACH OF US, PROFESSIONALS AND NON-PROFESSIONALS ALIKE,
HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO THROW OUR IDEAS ON THE TABLE FOR
SCRUTINY AND DISCUSSION. I ONLY HOPE THAT MY DOING SO WILL
STIMULATE OTHERS TO DO THE SAME.