



## LIFE AND DEATH OF CITIES

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**T**HE SKYLINE of lower Manhattan has been famous for years as an incredibly dense agglomeration of tall skyscrapers heaped together like the towers of Babylon. More recently, glass-box type buildings have been thrusting up in the midst of all this, to the annoyance of many who feel they are

blatant upstarts that clash with the view and further crowd the area.

Just as we thought the saturation point had been reached, along comes a new upstart overshadowing all the others - the World Trade Center on the lower west side - not one but twin buildings each rising 110 storeys, 100 feet taller than the Empire State Building. This biggest of all building projects dominates everything else and gives a lop-sided effect to lower Manhattan, as though it were going to tilt the island.

Unbelievably, more monsters are under way in lower Manhattan - one is the Battery Park City Project and another is the Manhattan Landing Project - both to be cities in themselves, with residential, shopping and office facilities. The World Trade Center consists only of office space, to be made available to New York State and to groups connected with world trade. When completed in 1974, it will have 10 million square feet of space to rent. It will house 50,000 workers plus an estimated 80,000 visitors a day - all on a site (including open areas) of sixteen acres.

One can appreciate the statistics of a building project the size of a city - the materials, water, electricity, ventilation, elevators, and the thousand other architectural and engineering problems that have been handled with consummate skill which has won great praise.

Yet with all this, the project is looked upon with disfavour, even consternation, by nearly all articulate observers, as a blight on the landscape, a flagrant example of insensate "pyramid building" - "the last

of the dinosaurs," says one observer.

The World Trade Center is a child of the Port of New York Authority, an agency which controls transportation in and out of New York. It is one of those curious entities which are neither governmental nor private, it wields great power, has tax-exempt bonding power and other privileges, and is subject neither to the scrutiny of the public nor the competition of the market. Also promoting this project are the Rockefellers - Nelson as governor of New York State and David as banker and head of the Lower Manhattan Association. Given such sponsorship, I suppose it was inevitable that such a colossus should emerge.

Among the ironies of the World Trade Center is that it comes at a time when transportation in New York is in a critical condition, and even though the Port Authority has charge of transportation, no thought or planning has been given to the increased pressures on transportation that will result. The creation of this Centre also comes at a time when an anti-world trade mood has hit the US. It comes at a time when planners and ecologists are concerned about urban and environmental problems and lands a monster-size problem in their midst like an apple of discord.

Several plans for congested lower Manhattan have come from such groups as the Planning Commission, the New York Citizens Housing and Planning Council and others, but they have gotten no farther than the drawing board; the exigencies of the "money game" and the "rat race" still dominate the scene and so long as big money and big power are in charge, these bright ideas remain dreams. So long as it is profitable to rent more space in the already crowded downtown area, more space will be carved out and rented.

In discussing the World Trade Center, critic Dore Ashton says, "Within the next decade there will have to be decisions, probably on a national level, to limit the profits in real estate, or the cities will perish."

It is perceptive to recognise that this matter is of such importance that the life and death of cities is involved. But so long as the profits are there to be had, limiting legislation will be futile. Since it is primarily a matter of land space, it would make more sense to take these land profits in taxation. This would lower the price of land and ease the pressures for overbuilding in already crowded areas. The power of such monopoly groups as the Port Authority also needs to be monitored.

The World Trade Center poses a challenge. It brings us to the brink of urban problems today. If we do not intelligently and rationally solve these problems, they will solve themselves by the cities becoming so strangulated and intolerable that they will simply be abandoned.