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jealous diatribe by John Mant
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East coast pearls

The Sunday Review 23.5.71 p.929 by John Mant

FOR A NUMBER of weeks now we have been exposed to the *Bulletin's* inept campaign to convince its readers that it's not really a conservative magazine from the Packer stable trying to give some intellectual gloss to the Liberal party and the DLP.

The Establishment of *If the Establishment won't tell you the Bulletin will* is not that well-known establishment which owns the newspapers, television stations, radios and backs the parties that have been in power in Australia and most of its states for the last 20 years, it is the "new patio intellectuals" and "new economists", sometimes known in other circles as the "left liberals".

The technique adopted is an old one. Take a point of view critical of policies adopted by conservative politicians; twist it to make it sound silly, or bigoted, or self-interested; dress up the conservative beliefs with a dash of science fiction and — zowie — the *Bulletin's* a radical magazine already.

It's all rather ironic, particularly as the two chief myth spinners, those well-known unpaid PR men of the Develop Australia Committee, Pete Samuel and Don Horne, are patio intellectuals *par excellence* — the one living in an architect designed project house in, but not of, Woden Valley and the other in a terrace house in Woolahra, the deep heart of patio country. I suppose they consider themselves as "old patio intellectuals", or, in the light of the *Bulletin's* phony renaissance, "new new patio intellectuals".

But beyond the name calling there's not much substance to be found in the articles. Horne's particular beef at the moment is the critics of the government's (and Labor's) immigration policy. Some might say he has deliberately misrepresented or pretended to misunderstand these critics, but I

think the more charitable explanation is that the critics interfere with the vision beautiful he has for Australia.

As the vision unfolds, the spectator realises that Horne is indeed a child of that world he described so well in the first volume of his autobiography — he really does believe that industrial man can do better, even best. Unlike many others in the 1970s, he has not lost his 1930s belief in technology. "The appalling problems of New York, or Tokyo, or London" are not inherently the fault of man or modern industrial society, but come from the lack of planning by bold, efficient philosopher kings.

In his latest diatribe against the critics of present immigration policies (*Bulletin*, May 1, 1971) Horne, after some usual introductory name calling, entirely misrepresents the critics' arguments by implying that they —

- (a) don't like foreigners;
- (b) do not appreciate the cultural improvement in Australia over the last 20 years;
- (c) believe that no more new people should be allowed to come to Australia and;
- (d) blame immigrants for what is, in fact, due to a succession of Liberal and Country party governments ignoring urban and regional planning and starving state and local governments of funds required to provide a reasonable standard of urban infrastructure.

While it is true that a few fringe rathags have suggested solutions born of a thinly disguised xenophobia to most of the urban ills, the majority of the critics have been advancing two simple propositions. The first is that the government's immigration policy is not a mere administrative exercise; it is economic, urban and social planning on a very major scale indeed. Liberal party planning is great for getting the population to the shores of Australia; to this point it is positive, indicative and selective (I

would say too selective). But, after leaving the port of entry, Liberal party planning doesn't exist. And not because the federal Liberal party just hasn't got around to internal resource, regional and urban planning; in fact it positively and proudly doesn't believe in it.

The second proposition is that until much more work has been done to quantify some of the costs and benefits of immigration, now may be a good time to cut back on a program which is not "natural" and which is presently unjustified.

But Horne would have none of this. He would still abuse the critics for being faint-hearted Little Australians. Somewhere along the line some town planner has sold Horne a vision of science fiction cities of the future and he has mistaken a planner's sales pitch for a description of what planners can actually achieve.

In one article (*BHP journal* summer 1970) Horne referred to "a 'necklace' of coastal metropolises stretching down the whole east coast from Cairns to Jervis Bay ... These cities can be of various sizes, but perhaps several of them should be allowed to become big. Sydney, for instance, can hold at least five million people by the year 2000. This would mean that parts of Sydney would become high density areas, but already 20 per cent of the population ... lives in flats. Sydney might really become one of the world's great cities."

It's difficult to know where to begin when faced with this type of foolishness. Of course Sydney can hold five million people; it could hold ten million people if we, apart, that is, from old and new patio intellectuals, were prepared to drop our living standards to urban peasant level.

How attractive is the "necklace" image? Stand at the top of Bulli Pass and look at the pearls that are Wollongong and Port Kembla, with

their endless low quality suburbs which disfigure the length of a once beautiful coastline. What on earth are the facts on which Horne bases his belief that the pearls about to be added will be any better?

What's this "allowed to become big"? That sounds like someone is in a position to stop Australian cities growing big. Tell that to the NSW Department of Decentralisation. And the fantasy of Sydney becoming one of the world's great cities just doesn't square with the reality of redevelopment into slum-like three-storey walk-ups, the mass social segregation of the new suburbs and, of interest to the old patios, the destruction of things like theatres, Lorenzini's (first and second), the Adria, the Hotel Australia and the Belvedere and their replacement by office buildings, banks, airline offices, plastic fodder restaurants and the Cahills chain.

The trouble with science fiction town planning is that it always shows the end product and seldom tells us how to get there. It is very boring to have to point out that town planning law in New South Wales is based on an English act of 1930 and was out of date when it was introduced in 1945; that the body responsible for planning Sydney has little power and none at all over the speed of Sydney's growth and that, at present, there seems no likelihood of the states or local government financing the rate of urban development presently being force-fed by Horne-backed commonwealth action.

The final irony of Horne's attitude is that the only politicians who are talking about comprehensive urban and regional planning and the administrative changes implicit, are leading members of the Labor party — men whom we can be sure the *Bulletin* will not be supporting next elections.

JOHN MANT

* "The same town planner was George Clarke"