

Behind The Bylines

Citizen Starr

Recently appointed New York Times editor Roger Starr took the podium as a private citizen and Henry J. Luce Professor of Urban Affairs at New York University, Feb. 25, to debate the head of the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects on Mr. Starr's favorite topic — "planned urban shrinkage." Insisting that he was speaking strictly as an "urban planning" professor and "not as an editor of the Times," Starr expanded views only slightly more obliquely in recent New York Times editorials, probably from his own pen. For example;

Editor Starr

Feb 28 — "A Hard Place to Do Business" "The number of jobs in New York City continues to drop... jobs have disappeared... private industry's reasons for their reluctance to view New York with favor is the feeling, not without a measure of truth, that this is a difficult place to do business..."

Jan 29 — "In Luxury Sinking"

"An English architect... has invented something called 'garbage housing.' This is not meant as a pejorative term but as a literal label for houses built with old beer bottles, cans and the general detritus of industrial and consumer society. The idea... is to beat the tyranny of costs with a simple act of conservation and ingenuity. Its avowed purpose is to find a rational approach to housing the poor..."

Professor Starr

Feb 25 — "I'm talking about 'transgenerational dependency'... children who grow up (in New York) in an atmosphere where they don't know what work means... It's essential to have job training with (forced) migration for people who don't respond to opportunity, or this city will become a dumping ground. We must end federal grants which anchor these people to the city... This is the national interest..."

Feb 25 — "My own agency, HDA (Starr served in New York's Human Development Administration for two years under Mayor Beame — ed.), relocates people to okay, not great, apartments after fires... In a planned economy people are moved, they have no choice... Now we have to cut services to areas, to plan for diminution and a city with less people... We must accept shrinkage, we can't avoid it..."

We are grateful to Mr. Starr for these frank explications of his expressions: but his audience of architects and social planning students was understandably aghast at his 'modest proposal' for reducing the city's population. One sympathetic listener counselled a crestfallen, sulking Starr in the cloakroom after the debate, "Roger, maybe it's your semantics."

New York Times Has Heavy Lie Insurance Coverage

"I'm not worried, I've been sued before... in similar circumstances. It's no problem. We have insurance against this type of thing."

Such was the reply of New York Timesman David Binder to a question from this column concerning a

threatened libel suit against the Times to the amount of \$100 million by Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez. Perez is outraged over Binder's "report" of CIA payments made to over a dozen third world leaders, published in that paper Feb. 19. Perez, a leader of OPEC, attacked the Times' report as a lie and the product of a conspiracy within the "highest levels" of the U.S. government to coerce his government into compliance with Carter policies. Perez's reaction forced an apology from

President Carter and a "personal" presidential retraction of the Times' report as "completely unfounded." Perez, however, is pursuing his thesis with the hefty libel suit, according to reports from the Spanish press service, EFE, last week.

Binder would not comment on the circumstances of previous legal suits, but it is a matter of public record that his career as a Timesman since 1961 has centered around reporting on "East Bloc affairs" and "ideological differences between various Communist countries," taking Binder to every crisis spot in Eastern Europe, beginning with the 1961 Berlin Wall.

Times legal counsellor Greenfield is taking the Perez suit with a grain of salt — "We get these reports (of libel suits) especially from third world countries all the time... let me tell you, they don't mean a thing." Greenfield, however, was concerned when told of Binder's previous journalistic run-ins with the law. "Well, er, uh, that must have been before he came to work at the Times."

Defense Of The Constitution

Even one of Jimmy Carter's journalistic "best friends," the Cox chain's Atlanta Constitution Journal "home" paper, is finding Times-style reporting too much to swallow. In a letter to the editor of the New York Times, Cox chain chairman Garner Anthony and the Atlanta paper's publishers charged that the Times in its Sunday Magazine section of Feb. 7 lied in reporting the circumstances under which a Constitution-Journal employee left that paper after reporting on discrimination in Atlanta private clubs, including those patronized by Griffin Bell. The Times article made it appear that the reporters' critical article so embarrassed the pro-Carter paper that its publishers forced him to resign.

Unconcerned with the questions of truth involved, New York Times' editors refused to print the Cox "letter of correction" to the editor — due to "considerations of space." The Constitution-Journal and Cox chairman Anthony took out paid ads in the Washington Post, Washington Star and other national newspapers instead. Five days later the Times also carried the paid ad.