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## Urban Policy

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# A gathering of the depopulation lobby

by Andrew Rotstein

On the top floor of New York University's Bobst Library on the afternoon of June 14, a luncheon marked the opening of the International Urban Symposium, the Citizens' Budget Commission's fiftieth anniversary celebration.

The idea of the symposium was that mayors from such cities as London, Hong Kong, Jakarta, and Milan could "share experiences" about urban problems with New York City's austerity experts. The symposium was a follow-up to the 1980 Rome Conference on Urban Futures sponsored by the U.N. Fund for Population Activities, at which the Mayor of Milan had demanded that the cities be emptied out as the advanced sector becomes transformed into a "post-industrial society."

"No question about it," said the short man, his aging jowls flapping as he chatted with a reporter. It was Harold Gelb, a vice-chairman of the CBC and a senior partner of the giant accounting firm Ernst & Whinney. "The city's budget is unrealistic. There's no way the money's there. Yes, after the elections in November, reality will hit this city. We simply don't have the means to maintain these services; people are going to have to realize this.

"Of course we don't have the money to support so many people," Gelb continued, his cocktail dwindling in inverse proportion to his crimson complexion.

"New York City lost a million people during the 1970s," said the reporter. "How many more do you think will go? Two million?"

"No, no. Only about a million," he replied, turning toward the bar for a refill.

At the other end of the room camped beside another bartender stood Mr. Illyd Harrington, Jr., the Deputy Mayor of London and leader of London's British Labour Party. He was asked if he too thought population was a major world problem.

"It's *the* most important problem," he said emphatically, clearing his throat with three or four more swallows of wine. "We've lost a couple of million people in London in recent years, we're at about the right level now."

"What do you think, though, about delivering services in a depression that is sapping local revenues?" the

reporter queried. "Can the population, which is increasingly black and Pakistani, be supported? Are things like hospices more efficient than hospitals?"

"Well, we do have laws restricting immigration of these people," he answered. "But, yes, we don't have the right mix. As for hospices, what you're getting at is euthanasia, isn't it? It's a dirty word, but it *is* there, isn't it? I believe the world is going to blow up anyway sooner or later," Harrington concluded, beckoning the bartender for more refreshment. "Do you realize there are going to be 6 billion people by the year 2000? Six billion! We had the right amount at the turn of the century—about 2 billion."

### 'It's disgusting'

After the arrival of NYU President John Brademas, a former Congressman and Rhodes scholar, and the former Mayor of New York, John Lindsay, the luncheon began. While Metropolitan Transit Authority board member Stephen Berger discoursed at one table on the necessity of ending New York City transit service to ghetto areas, another table was holding dispassionate banter on the terrible goldbricking and unproductivity of the American workforce. "It's disgusting," croaked Wassily Leontieff, the white-haired Nobel laureate.

"That's why we'll never be able to do what the Japs are doing," added Donald Kummerfeld, the former executive director of the Financial Control Board, which has dictated draconian budget cuts to the city for the last seven years. Kummerfeld moved on to become the chief executive officer of the enterprises of Rupert Murdoch, the Australian who owns the *New York Post* and is the loudest purveyor of British policy in New York.

"I just finished a study on cost-effective alternatives to incarceration," chirped an up-and-coming young think-tanker across the table, trying to catch Kummerfeld's attention. "We have some ideas that would be much more effective than Mayor Koch's Rikers Island labor camps. I'm at a place now where we're studying the planned shrinkage of the transit system. It's hush-hush, but we're projecting cutting service to various parts of the city, altering routes, etcetera."

Kummerfeld leaned over the table, interrupting the aspiring careerist. "You know, of course," he smiled, "that will mean the death of whole areas of the city. But I'll say it: the Puerto Ricans have been getting a free ride."

"Ssshhh, Don," whispered Gelb, with a chuckle. "Remember what happened to Peter Grace," referring to the Grace grain company czar who recently drew media and minority group criticism when he described the food-stamp system as a preserve for Puerto Ricans.

"I don't give a damn," snapped Kummerfeld. "I'm not running for office."