

Chapter 3

DECENTRALISATION AND CIVIL DEFENCE

THE DOMINANCE OF THE CITY

THROUGHOUT history human beings have tended to group themselves into compact communities. Initially the urge arose from the need for shelter and mutual protection, but the advantages and added opportunities of community life encouraged more and more people to leave the countryside to seek fortune in the more exciting atmosphere of cities. This movement from country to city has become more significant since the great industrial expansion of the 19th century revolutionised the whole conception of production and employment. All over the world Governments have shown concern, with varying degrees of awareness and action, at the adverse effect of this movement on the distribution of population and sources of employment.

The reasons for the trend are not hard to find. The more profitable and varied opportunities of employment, the better facilities for education, culture, amusement and recreation, the attraction of a bustling, lively community in direct contrast to the quietness and solitude of the countryside, all have their influence. Although the trend is understandable, the possible detrimental effect on such vital matters as food production and the greater vulnerability of the population to hostile attack must remain matters of grave concern.

In Australia, concentration of activities in the large cities is more marked than in any other country of the world. This is fostered by the high efficiency of primary production in this country. In each State we find the capital city containing a high proportion of the population. In Victoria, Melbourne's population of nearly 1,500,000 is 60 per cent. of the State's total. The next largest centres are Geelong with about 60,000, Ballarat 48,000, Bendigo and the Latrobe Valley each with about 34,000. Then come towns of 10,000 people and fewer.

Although the growth and development of Melbourne are discussed under "Survey and Analysis," a recapitulation of the reasons for this growth of one large city will not be out of place.

Throughout the ages, cities have grown and flourished for many reasons, but generally the major concentrations of population have occurred in capital cities, around centres of commercial distribution and of import and export, around coalfields and, in more recent years, around oil fields.

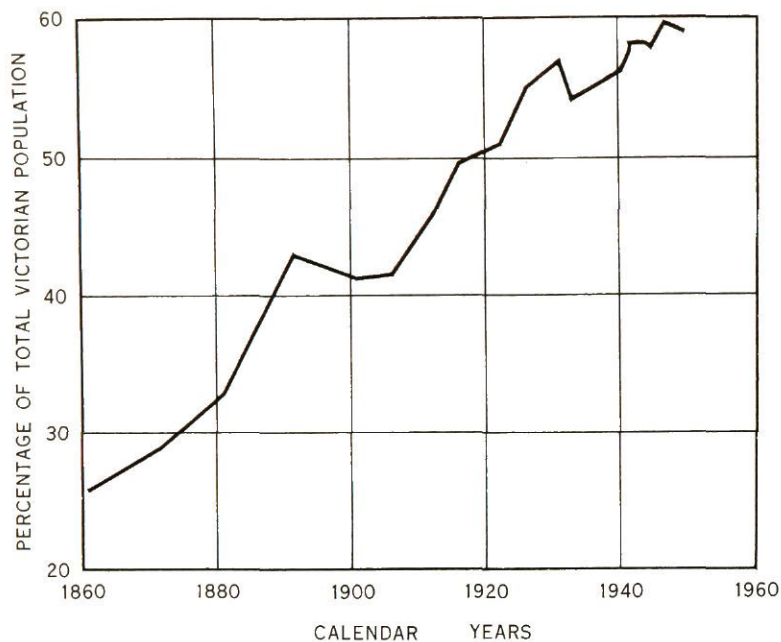
In Victoria we find Port Phillip Bay, at the head of which stands Melbourne, the only body of water offering opportunities for large scale harbour development in over 1,000 miles of coastline. It is natural, therefore, that it has developed as the main centre of import and export for the whole State and for the Riverina district of southern New South Wales. It is from Melbourne that the State developed and from here the early settlers penetrated into the hinterland. It is understandable that the main roads and the railways therefore radiated from this focal point.

Apart from the brown coal deposits of the Latrobe Valley, which have been exploited only in recent years, there were no large deposits of coal in Victoria around which industry, and therefore population, might concentrate. Most of the coal came to Melbourne by sea, thus providing a logical reason for industry to establish itself here. Although the extensive development in the Latrobe Valley will, in the future, create an important centre of population and industry there, the existing predominance of Melbourne, and the lesser dependence of industry on raw coal, are certain to prevent the growth which might otherwise have taken place.

No oil in commercial quantities has been found in Victoria, nor even in Australia. There are no large navigable rivers as in America where, because of the barrier imposed on the way to the interior, crossing places became centres of activity, and later, as river traffic was developed, of commercial distribution. The natural factors which might have led to the growth of other large cities were absent in Victoria, and the country towns have remained largely dependent on the pastoral and agricultural needs of the surrounding districts.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Melbourne was chosen as the centre of government for the State. In 1900, when Federation brought about the need for a Commonwealth administration, Melbourne, because of its geographical position, became the seat of Commonwealth Government and the location of its administrative departments. It continued in this role until the Commonwealth Government moved to Canberra in 1927, but even to-day many Commonwealth departments have their headquarters in Melbourne.

Thus, because of the provisions of nature, we find Melbourne the seat of government, the centre of import and export, the centre for the distribution of coal and oil, and the



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focal point of commercial distribution — all those activities, which more than any others, have caused cities to grow. We find the city is also the principal industrial centre and the principal market. Over the years we find an increasing proportion of the population of the State concentrated in this one big city. Nowhere else in the State can we find conditions which might give rise to the growth of centres of population which could now detract from the dominant position which Melbourne has reached.

As the business and commercial heart of the State, it has all the advantages to the industrialist of a great source of labour and of a convenient centre for distribution. For the worker the city offers pleasant homes in attractive suburbs, and boundless opportunities for both employment and relaxation. So unless there should arise some unforeseen economic change, Melbourne is likely to remain the magnet for more and more people.

To attempt to counter this is not the Board's task. State-wide decentralisation is the province of the State Government. The Board can deal only with the city, but in doing so it must take cognisance of the wider perspective.

THE PROBLEM OF CIVIL DEFENCE

The last world war clearly showed that in times of national emergency protecting the civil population and maintaining normal community activities are essential parts of the war effort. Atomic weapons, with their enormous potential for wide-scale destruction, and the greater range of the aeroplane, have since further complicated this problem, and have made it not only more urgent but many times more formidable.

The increasing concentration of population in cities must be looked at from a new angle. No large city today can afford to ignore the risks of warfare, and must take all practicable precautions in its civic development to minimise loss of life and property should it be attacked.

In this, town planning can play its part. The civil defence authorities advise that planning can best help by encouraging the dispersal of population, by avoiding as far as possible the creation of worthwhile targets, and by establishing a system of communications which will facilitate movement throughout the area. This need and these authoritative opinions have been kept in mind in drawing up the planning scheme.

Public open spaces will break up the urban mass of homes and buildings and provide some degree of dispersal of the population. A comprehensive arterial road system, which would considerably aid the defence of the city in wartime, has been provided for.

Town planning of itself cannot prevent the establishment of worthwhile and vital wartime targets. Such targets could arise by the concentration of a large number of essential factories in a relatively compact area, or by having a number of factories of the same type close together. Successful attack on such targets could result in several essential factories being destroyed at the one time or a large section of one industry being lost. Such undesirable grouping of industries is already occurring in Melbourne.

Obviously a planning scheme cannot dictate where each particular industry or factory shall be established. Its function is merely to zone areas for industrial purposes generally, and in so doing to distribute them, having regard to defence needs. Short of the Government assuming extraordinary powers, it is difficult to see how in a democratic country the location of individual concerns can be directed in the interests of defence. However, this is a question which industry, especially the larger concerns, might well consider for its own advantage. Collaboration between industry and the defence authorities in this matter is necessary. Neither can ignore the fact that the atomic bomb, and possibly even worse weapons, will make maintenance of the internal war effort in any future war even more hazardous and complex than in World War II.

Industrial zoning, as recommended in the planning scheme, will contribute materially to the dispersal of industry. The peacetime aims of this zoning are mainly to minimise congestion and to have factories so scattered throughout the metropolitan area that they can draw on workers within a reasonable radius, and employees thus do not have long distances to travel to work. In wartime this decentralisation could be of immense value as a precaution against large scale destruction of industry from air attack.

If to this can be added some measure of decentralisation of business and civic administration, then town planning will have made a really worthwhile contribution to the very important and very difficult problem of civil defence. We