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DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS FOR 2ND SOUTH AFRICAN BUILDING  
RESEARCH CONGRESS 5TH MAY, 1969.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The connotations implicit in your Congress theme, "Building for the Future", are those which fire the imagination. This is certainly coloured by the notable scientific achievements of the immediate past: heart transplants and manned flights around the moon. These are truly wonderful achievements, but what about man's built environment - the tightly woven fabric of functional relationships and interrelationships of both  
2/the physical

the physical and human milieu in which we live - an understanding of this is probably one of the most tantalizing yet compelling challenges of our time.

Thus when we talk about "Building for the Future" we are in effect talking about the building or creation of man's environment. This is the challenge that must be met and it is for us to ensure that this is achieved in such a way as will meet the complex social, economic and cultural needs of our people with all the resourcefulness available to us. This is surely one of the most complex problems yet to be tackled by man.

It is only right that a congress of this nature should be held under the aegis of the National Building Research Institute:

3/for it is

for it is through research that man will gain the insight so urgently needed. The challenges of today must be met not only with that same courage and steadfastness that have characterized the growth of South Africa but also with the quest for knowledge.

For this reason, I am gratified to note that we have with us at this ceremony some of the world's leading authorities in the field of building research. I should like to extend a warm welcome to these guests from overseas and to those from our neighbouring territories. Their contribution to the stimulation and cross-fertilization of ideas is greatly appreciated; I trust that you will all enjoy your stay with  
4/us and will

us and will take back with you pleasant memories of South Africa. The importance to all of us in South Africa of being able to come into contact with men of this calibre, on a personal basis, cannot be over estimated. The opportunity provided for the exchange and cross-fertilization of ideas is of inestimable value.

The issues involved in the theme of this Congress, namely "Building for the Future", are in a sense universal - they impinge not only on the technology of building but on the world-wide phenomena of population increase and the accelerating rate of urbanisation.

The tangible evidence of our endeavours to achieve our goals will largely be represented by physical artifacts - a reflection of man's social and cultural needs. The means ' ,  
5/by which

by which we will achieve these goals is that of the Building and Construction Industry. When considering the scope of activities implicit in this task one must not only deal with the technical challenges but due cognizance must also be taken of vital social and economic challenges.

The field of endeavour therefore embraces inter alia: urban development, re-development, housing - its social and economic aspects - the building of industrial, commercial, institutional and cultural complexes and the construction of civil engineering projects - dams, harbours and irrigation schemes etc.

The Building and Construction Industries can be justifiably proud of the fact that they have moved with the times in the realization that effective organization is most essential if maximum efficiency is to be achieved in a field of activities with such wide ramifications as are found in the industry.

Whilst the Republic's recent and unprecedented growth in all sectors of the economy has created certain problems in some instances requiring the introduction of controls and restrictions to curtail possible undesirable trends, it is of paramount importance that the building industry continue to grow at a sufficiently high rate to keep pace with the demand of other sections of our vigorous economy.

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In order to ensure this continued growth, it is essential to actively pursue the policy of careful planning at all stages. This is particularly significant when seen in the light of the industry's role in the national economy.

The building industry is, in terms of private and public investment, an extremely important avenue; as an employer it is one of the largest industries in the country. It provides direct employment for over 270,000 persons, or roughly one-fifth of the total employed in secondary industry. In addition there are many thousands employed in related professional services and in supporting industries. It is also of significance to note that one of its characteristics is the dependency either directly or indirectly, of numerous

ancillary industries on it, thus influencing in turn their progress and prosperity.

As Minister of Community Development and Public Works, I have, in reading some of the Congress papers, been struck by the fact that for the year ending 1967 the gross domestic investment in building construction amounted to R1,257 million, which equals 13.1% of the gross domestic product. This figure also represents 46.5% of the total gross domestic investment in South Africa - a highly significant percentage to bear in mind.

It can be rightly said therefore that the economic prosperity which the building industry enjoyed during the past few years, has given a tremendous impetus to the country's general economic development.

9/However,

However the building industry consists not only of a large number of sections, but also a large number of firms within each of these sections. This does not imply that the building industry, as a result, is inefficient but rather indicates the complexity of the problem of co-ordinating and planning a multiplicity of activities.

The Government is very much aware of this problem and in order to facilitate planning in general and that for the building industry in particular, have at the recommendation of the Building Research Advisory Committee of the National Building Research Institute, established the Building and Construction Advisory Council under the aegis of my Department of Public Works.

It is of signal interest that the First Building Research Congress in 1964 was instrumental in the formation of this Council through its Congress resolutions and I sincerely trust that as a result of your deliberations and in the formulation of resolutions of this Congress, equally important and constructive lines of action might emerge.

I was also pleased to learn from the Congress Programme that you will be discussing another important aspect of the building industry, namely that of the development and use of industrialized building techniques. In achieving this goal it seems to me necessary to stress the need for close collaboration between the building industry and the appropriate central, Provincial and local Government agencies. This is,

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I feel, essential and important as the principle holds many advantages both for the industry and the country as a whole.

Some problems have, however, to be solved in order to derive optimum advantage from these modern building techniques and it is, I feel, necessary to emphasize the need for proper planning as an essential pre-requisite for the successful development and application of these capital-intensive building techniques. One aspect of such planning is the need for a valid means of assessing the performance of buildings erected by these means and it gives me great pleasure to tell this Congress that largely as a result of research we will, very shortly, have operating in this country, an effective procedure for the evaluation of new techniques, components and materials.

New systems of industrialized building with acceptable standards have a direct bearing on our national economy, our progress and, not least, our safety and well-being. It has, therefore, become essential to lay down acceptable performance and durability criteria to which such new techniques should conform. Associated with this and forming an integral part of the procedure, is the need to establish suitable machinery for the evaluation and selection of the most suitable methods to be employed for any given purpose.

Thus apart from the purely technical evaluation of new building techniques, the need exists for the appraisal of related aspects which may exercise more serious considerations - such as economic factors, manpower implications, construction

13/time and

time and the overall suitability. The procedure to which I referred therefore aimed at establishing whether any given technique will prove satisfactory in all respects or not.

An essential characteristic of the building industry is the way in which it has changed from a craft activity to a modern, highly industrialized operation requiring the services of a wide range of highly trained specialists.

In further studying the Congress Programme I was pleased, therefore, to see that some sessions are to be devoted to the importance of training and management.. The problem of recruiting manpower, particularly skilled and professional, is one that has been incubating for some years and with the

14/increasing

increasing demands placed on the industry is beginning to manifest itself more seriously.

Whilst I realize the difficulties involved and not wishing to give an unrealistic over-simplified impression of the situation, I do feel that a good deal could be done to improve the situation by increasing productivity through more efficient training of labour and by the more effective utilization of the country's professional and artisan labour resources.

It, furthermore, seems to me that this situation could be eased by large-scale co-ordinated planning - a point I have referred to earlier - both within the building and construction industries and between them and the public and

15/private

private agencies concerned with building. Because of this challenge - "Building for the Future" - we must avoid any tendencies which would tend towards fragmentation of the industry and the related professions - we as a young developing country can ill afford such luxuries. It is pleasing that the relationship between the engineer, architect and builder has for some years now been becoming closer. The establishment of three schools of Building Science and Management at our universities will in addition to providing graduates required by the industry also further facilitate harmonious relationships.

Various financial considerations profoundly influence building and indeed the whole industry has been likened to a

sensitive and dependable barometer of the national economy. While this may be so, I would prefer to see it on an even keel and steadily forging ahead in fair weather. I do not propose to deal in depth with these complex financial considerations but would like to isolate one important aspect, that of cost reduction. I believe that what we have achieved in this country in the field of low-cost housing could, with modifications in degree and kind, be achieved in many other fields of the industry's activities. I should like to stress that the concept of cost reduction should not be erroneously thought of as representing a reduction in quality or standards but rather that of providing an equivalent structure at a lower cost or a better building at the same cost. In striving to achieve this goal the

17/paradoxically

paradoxically obvious, yet often ignored cardinal principle of applying systematic and rational thinking and the intelligent use of available skills and knowledge to the problem will in most instances provide the desired result. In addition all aspects of building require planning. If this phase is tackled by all the parties concerned at the earliest possible stage, the chance to effect significant savings is enhanced.. These considerations appear to me to be sound and the goals are surely worth striving for: not only in relation to building but also planning of all types and at all levels, whether physical, social or economic; central, provincial and local, all should be co-ordinated so

18/as to

as to ensure continuity of the process.

Research has played a vital role in this respect. The results of which, if I may say, are classically illustrated by the contribution it has made in assisting my Department of Community Development and the local authorities in providing satisfactory housing at a reasonable cost for the lower income groups not only throughout South Africa, but in other African and indeed overseas countries.

Finally, there are two points about building research that I should like to stress. First, we should be very selective in the way we apply our limited research manpower: for instance our research should be directed towards practical issues - it must deal with real problems. Secondly, the usefulness of research can be enhanced by the quick and effective

19/application

application of its findings in practice. This I know is a policy which has been actively pursued by the National Building Research Institute and one, which, because of the keenness and receptivity of the industry, has in the past met with considerable success. However, I do feel and would like to suggest that all possible ways and avenues be explored so as to close this gap even further. It is essential if we are to ensure the maximum and optimum benefits to the industry in particular and the nation as a whole. This objective of the dissemination of information and the exchange of ideas is implicit in this Congress. I am confident that it will stimulate greater interest in research work being carried out locally and overseas, and that it will

provide an opportunity for the dissemination of the findings emerging from research and an exchange of views on the issues affecting building in the country. I am also sure that it will also stimulate and promote close contact between research workers on the one hand and the professions and building construction industries on the other. These are sentiments to which I heartily subscribe.

Before closing I think it appropriate to pay tribute to the National Building Research Institute's Building Research Advisory Committees who have in no small measure contributed to the success of this Institute. They have shown themselves to be an important unifying and co-ordinating body, serving with vigour and sincerity the

21/interests

interests of the industries and professions they represent and those of the country as a whole. I extend to them my sincere thanks.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the building and construction and related industries and professions in the generous way in which they have supported this Congress, both financially and by their presence.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare this Congress duly opened.

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