



Allan FOTHERINGHAM

ONE OF THESE DAYS — SOMETIME within the next 30, I suspect — this town is going to wake up to the hoax played upon it regarding Habitat Forum. Sometime, somewhere, somebody in high places is going to catch on to what Al Clapp, the guru of the human part of Habitat, is doing.

What he is doing is to ensure that the public will never allow the park board to tear down those five giant hangars at Jericho Beach which will house the happenings that will be upon us exactly two weeks from today.

Once the Great Unwashed actually get down there and see the potential of Jericho, there is no way they will allow the fusty park board to demolish the ungainly great buildings that are the focus of Clapp's remarkable reincarnation. Clapp, a shrewd practitioner of the art of public opinion-moulding, knows that and relies on it. Bet on it.

★

TO UNDERSTAND, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND the erotic fascination the heavies of the Vancouver park board have with grass. Great empty expanses of green grass in a city that is all green due to the dew, that droppeth from heaven. Cliff

MacKay, when he was with us, used to concur with the stated pledge of a veteran NPA alderman who promised to eat alive any child ever found in a city park on a weekend.

He, of course, was correct. Discover me of the park board's expanses and I may join in the meal. What Vancouver needs — with mountains and bush and ocean all around — is facilities on the unused grass. Tennis courts. Lawn bowls. Checker courts. Pools or rinks or pitches. Putting the green grass to work. The park board essentially is an excellent organization with high standards — marred only by this fascination with empty spaces, unused and unoccupied.

Jericho, wrested finally (25 years after the war ended) from the defence department clods of Ottawa, was a prime example. Park board, under grass-obsessed Stu Lefebvre, decided the only solution was to raze the hangars. They were of no use, it was decreed.

Enter Clapp, who has the personality of a mongoose and the witty imagination of a Woody Allen. He had staged the wildly successful launching of the last Greenpeace whale expedition from Jericho and

immediately recognized its vast potential, since it happens to have the most spectacular 180-degree view of the city, the harbor, the mountains and God's wonders.

★

ENTER THE UNITED NATIONS' Habitat conference, merely the largest UN gathering ever held. Clapp, an opportunist with a mission, induced the UN's J. G. Van Patten down to Jericho, sold him on the site and was away to the races — as much to do the park board one in the eye as to produce Habitat Forum, the only item as yet to excite any Vancouver interest in this whole exercise.

One has to experience the site to realize what Clapp hath wrought — essentially with recycled materials and the ignored segments of society. The public will get a better idea this weekend when the general populace is invited down to help in a clean-up of the site. It is a barn-raising circa 1976.

My favorite story, among the pensioners, layabouts, welfare recipients and idealists who have shaped this site that displays a raw sensitivity with wood (thereby depicting the best and worst of B.C.) is Doug Lotoski. Father of six, he rises each dawn in Nanaimo, takes the ferry to Vancouver, spends the day teaching apprentices from prison how to weld the old railings from Lions Gate Bridge that form the fence on the Jericho dock, then takes the ferry back each late evening to Nanaimo. He's a believer, fuelled by the imagination of the prickly Clapp.

Yesterday afternoon, a woman in grey

hair manipulated a huge Cranemobile, shifting giant timbers into place. Two boys in hard hats, perhaps 13, nailed down planks under the opening gate that resembles Lumberman's Arch crossed with a Japanese Torii portal leading to a Shinto temple. A man in a wheelchair named the guard post.

★

ALL THIS EGO-TRIPPING IN THE home of bureaucrats, naturally, brings about the inevitable pendulum theory. Those who would do Clapp in, as revenge for his overweening personality and remarkable success, have been waiting in the weeds. There is the case of Clapp, who will never make the Junior League etiquette list, phoning Mary Falconer, a white-haired p.r. lady of the many p.r. firms that infest the downtown formal segment of Habitat, and laying on her several dozen words that she did not know existed in the English language.

The courtly Dr. Hugh Keenleyside, the local Habitat commissioner-general, thereupon phoned Mr. Clapp and advised him he was not to speak to p.r. ladies that way. Mr. Clapp, being of the inclination, thereupon laid upon Dr. Keenleyside the same words that Dr. Keenleyside, one suspects, did not know existed. Dr. Keenleyside, since then, has written to Mr. Clapp threatening legal action if those same words are ever uttered again over the phone lines. In all, the inner workings of the Habitat mini-bureaucrats could win the ratings game from Mary Hartman, if ever revealed.

In the same genre, there is the wildly-distorted job on Clapp done in Vancouver magazine by one Allen Carr, who neglects to inform the reader of only one small fact: He was once fired by Mr. Clapp and has a certain vested interest in the eviction.

★

AT THE BASE OF IT ALL IS SOMETHING familiar. The standard premise in this country (that assumes it is Canadian) is that it can't possibly be any good) has been projected on to a city-scale. A Vancouver small-mindedness death wish. The timorous disappearing-act of the man at city hall who was elected to lead and instead elects to flee, is married with a bush attitude that shies from the challenge of the city moving into the big leagues. This town's previous experience with internationalism was with the 26 countries who came to the 1954 British Empire Games; 130 will come here in two weeks and the town shrinks in fright from the challenge.

The entire idea of save-the-whales and the law of the sea thrust came out of the UN Stockholm conference on the environment four years ago, of which Habitat is the offspring. The chances of a world focus on human settlements coming out of Vancouver are just as good. It's why I grow impatient with the tiny minds of the city whose main task, two weeks before opening day, is to mete their revenge upon the unorthodox Mr. Al Clapp. He ain't no saint, but he got Habitat off the ground and running — something no committee could ever do.