

# Officialdom frets as 'freaks' build B.C. showplace

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VANCOUVER  
The handwriting is curiously childish in Al Clapp's journal of progress, and the spelling atrocious. Somehow, the over-all effect is that of a small but very angry little boy scrawling his taunts to a hostile world.

"To hell with them."  
With that, Al Clapp, a grown-up ex-television-producer and a powerhouse of West Coast energy, dismisses whoever happens to be the big bad "them" of the moment—the wishy-washy mayor, a vacillating cabinet minister, the entire federal government—you know those heavy people who can stand in your way, screw things up and generally make life difficult for a bunch of freaks messing around with close to a million bucks, and a plan to transform a cluster of old airport hangars into a "showplace of significant ideas" all in the name of Canada's international image.

Al Clapp and his dream have an official title, Habitat Forum, and an important role in an event which, if successful, could help rescue Canada's international reputation before it crashes in that kamikaze mission known as the summer Olympics.  
The event is Habitat, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. That sounds dry and esoteric, but could explode into an exciting offering of solutions to the ever-pressing problem of how to house our growing population.

From May 31 to June 11, Habitat is expected to draw about 2,000 official delegates from 135 UN countries to its official meetings at various downtown hotels and the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Thousands of unofficial delegates are expected to come to the parallel conference, called Habitat Forum.

Habitat, the largest conference ever to be sponsored by the UN, is an attempt to come to grips with some scary statistics: notably, that the population of the world is expected to double during the next 30 years, which means that 3.5 billion more people will have to find places to live.

## Series of scraps

So far, however, the most visible feature of Habitat and Habitat Forum has been a series of scraps between different levels of government.

Even the federal cabinet minister in charge of the project, Urban Affairs Minister Barnett Danson, has admitted he is "embarrassed" by some of the questions international delegates have been asking him about Habitat, for instance: Does Canada really want us?

That question is asked because the city of Vancouver—in the person of Mayor Art Phillips—requested last fall that Ottawa shelve the conference because of the expected presence of the controversial Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO),

and hostile reaction to a UN resolution equating Zionism with racism.

Although the federal government ruled the conference would go on, and the city then half-heartedly pledged to work toward its success in every way possible, the scrapping hasn't stopped.

First, there was the city's complaint that it would be stuck with the policing bill for Habitat, and the federal government's vague response that no, it would provide.

Then there was the furor over a possible "tent city" unfolding to house the thousands of wayfarers venturing into Vancouver to take part in Habitat Forum.

Even now, Mayor Phillips, liberal to the point of non-conviction on some major issues, says flatly the city "hasn't really got a position" on Habitat Forum, except to express annoyance that conference organizers seem to be "totally fuzzy" on how many visitors Habitat and Habitat Forum are expected to bring and to say darkly, "I hope there will be no problems of a violent nature."

Oh, yes: The mayor adds that he does not really think Habitat "will solve any housing problems" and that Al Clapp, the project manager of Habitat Forum, "is getting a little paranoid."

A couple of days earlier, Al was down at the Habitat Forum site—a former Air Force base at Jericho Beach Park, 175 acres with five

bashed-up old hangars—holding a staff meeting.

The sun was filtering in through wooden shutters in an exquisite little meeting room crafted out of B.C. cedar and built into a corner of one of the old hangars. The room is one of the first visible examples of what can be done with old lumber materials to an old crummy room. That's part of the theme of Habitat Forum: the art of recycling.

## Funky clothes

All around Clapp was youth, and long hair, and funky clothes, and many of the accoutrements of what one of the approximately 110 workers said "straight society calls the counter-culture."

Indeed, one of Prime Minister Trudeau's aides on the site, Paul Manning, ecstatically refers to Al Clapp's Forum as "an intellectual Woodstock," a term which would be less than the sound of sweet music to the city's police officials.

There is a fierce sense of ownership here, perhaps because Habitat Forum as it is being developed, was the brainchild of Clapp, a former producer for EC-TV, and two architect friends, who went up on a near-by mountain to think one weekend and came down with dreams of Jericho (which Clapp insists on spelling Jerricho in his diary).

They approached the federal government, agreed to use Local initia-

tives Projects and grants totalling about \$750,000, and got the go-ahead to transform Jericho into what Clapp sees as a showplace of B.C. talent, materials and ideas — most of them recycled.

A five-man sawmill, operating in one of the hangars, came on loan from the provincial corrections department, as did five young convicts who were supposed to know all about welding. Their responsibility was to put together 2,400 feet of old metal railings from the Lion's Gate Bridge into a border for Jericho's magnificent waterfront setting.

One problem with those convicts: They did not know the first thing about welding, so good-natured Clapp and Co. found themselves paying them the standard \$175 a week, training them, feeding them and supplying them with materials. The political statement that Clapp hopes to make with Habitat Forum is this: "We (society) have enough of everything." For Clapp, what matters is that giant corporations and governments are wasting usable materials and shirking from making the kinds of political decisions needed to do what we have wisely.

To that end, old logs which major logging companies have rejected as salvageable are picked up, wet and soggy from the beaches, dried, put through the sawmill, and used in construction. Some 1,300 pounds of assorted used nails are diligently sorted and used in the building. The various hangars on the site, now sad eyesores with shattered

windows and peeling paint, will become a theatre, a social centre, restaurants and display areas for such things as solar heat and windmills.

Although construction is moving right along, it is still possible, on a sunny day, to stand in the middle of Jericho and wonder how Al Clapp can sleep at night. The spectre of an unfinished Habitat Forum looms like that of Jean Drapeau's ill-fated Olympics.

"Look," says Clapp, a youthful 46 who believes that age is irrelevant.



AL CLAPP

The mayor has doubts

"Habitat Forum will never be finished, but it will be ready."

Clapp objects to the energy he has to expend in daily confrontation with the outside world — hassling major companies for donations, scrapping with health inspectors, Workmen's Compensation Board people.

"I don't know what do those people out there think anyway, that we're gonna take all this loot and run away to Mexico!"

Then, there were outside suspicions that dope was being consumed on the premises, suspicions, writes Clapp in his diary, which got going the day Margaret Trudeau visited the site, and her RCMP agent reported that he had smugled the evil weed in one of the offices.

## No smoking up

The smell, said Clapp, was an innocuous Indian cigarette affected by one of his workers. "I'm not gonna jeopardize the whole space over a crummy joint," he protests. "Anyone smokes on the job — automatic firing."

Clapp has this idea that what he is putting together is a movie. In fact, he is filming it, but what he means is that he is producing and directing a whole series of scenes involving different people on different sets, and the result, he hopes, will have worldwide implications.

"We're not just a local thing. We're national, and international. People out there are saying, 'Can these freaks put it together?'"