



MEMO

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FROM THE OCTAGON

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THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY

Members of AIA's Executive Committee, in session in Washington last week, listened to President Truman's speech Friday night, followed hard by his declaration of a national emergency, and took appropriate steps to allow the profession to respond to the President's call for unity, austerity, and rearmament. The Committee heard expert analyses of the Washington situation as it affected the profession from key government figures, the Octagon staff, and others. James Follin, construction controls division chief at NPA, lunched with the Committee. Ralph Kaul, heading up the housing and community facilities work of NSRB, briefed them on emerging national housing policies. Louis Justement, veteran Washington architect and housing expert, commented on materials and credit controls. F. Stuart Fitzpatrick, manager of the Construction and Civic Development Department of the U. S. Chamber of Commerce, earlier this year made Hon. AIA, gave a crisp summary of what faced the building industry. Harold Dana Hauf, chairman of the AIA-Producers Council Joint Committee, led a meeting of the two groups and emphasized the importance of modular coordination as a way to stop waste in a period of materials shortage. The Institute's top executives also heard reports from the National Defense and other Institute committees bearing on the immediate situation. Information and advice from these and other sources lay back of much Committee action.

Events of the past week reflected growing tension in the world, as well as a steadily deteriorating military situation in Korea. The President's actions struck resounding blows at the normal routines of architectural offices and civilian life. Lifting the strength of the armed forces by a million men will further deplete the ranks of younger architects and draftsmen. Centralization of defense production powers in the hands of Charles E. Wilson, president of General Electric, signalized the transfer of building industry controls from the National Production Authority to the new agency. In this and in other ways the week's events affected the profession and heralded changes in the political and economic climate in which architecture is made.

Major Executive Committee actions further retailored the Institute's national headquarters activities, in line with the growing seriousness of international affairs and a sombre view of harsher days ahead for the profession. Budget changes stressed reserves, held current expenditures strictly in line. Convention plans were reframed with an eye on possible transportation limitations by May. Earlier action by the National Defense Committee against group deferments was endorsed by the Executive Committee. It stepped up the work of committees relating to civilian defense, housing, the architect and government, and other defense-related activities. For its own security and the preservation of a nationally important record extending over 92 years, action was taken to microfilm membership and other key records and provide for the succession of officers.

CIVIL DEFENSE

Wednesday the House will take up a favorable report on the administration's civil defense bill, now endorsed by the committees of both houses of Congress. One major clash is evident on the proposal for dual-purpose "communal type" shelters. Institute action, stemming from Harry Prince's Civilian Defense Subcommittee, supports the bill, which would establish a Civil Defense Administration, an independent agency of government. Prince's report suggested cabinet status for the proposed CDA.

CONVENTION RESERVATIONS

We hope you have doodled suitable identifying signs around May 8 - 11 on your new 1951 calendars and look forward to seeing you at the Institute's Chicago convention. If you count on staying at the convention headquarters, write now to Fred Saunders, Sales Manager, Edgewater Beach Hotel, for reservations. Identify yourself as an Institute member. Until February 1 your reservation can be assured. After that you have lost your AIA priority and take your chances with the general public.

DISPERSAL

The Government Services Administration's plan for dispersal of Federal office buildings to the outlying parts of the Washington metropolitan region is being considered now and will probably be passed during this session. The bill asks for authority to construct eight dispersal centers instead of the four originally contemplated. But the plan, for which \$190,000,000 is now being asked, is essentially the same as that originally proposed in August. The aim of the President is to get a legislative green light as soon as possible. The program calls for one permanent building to house some 5,000 workers on each of the sites, which are to be provided with sufficient roads and utilities to allow for further construction as required. GSA's brochure reveals plans for standardized block-type buildings of reinforced concrete construction, with specially reinforced basements designed for use as bomb shelters and as cafeterias. Some estimate of the magnitude of the program may be gained from the statement of Public Buildings Commissioner Reynolds that 5.5% of the total national production of concrete reinforcing bars would be required in the construction.

BERTRAM E. GIESECKE

The recent unexpected death of Texas architect Bertram E. Giesecke deprived the profession of an outstanding leader. Giesecke, who was 58, was lunching with a friend in Austin when seized with a heart attack. He died shortly after, in the doctor's office. Born in New Braunfels, Texas, he made his home in Austin, where he was a partner in the firm of Giesecke, Kuehne and Brooks. At the time of his death Giesecke was Chairman of the Defense Department's National Housing Commission and had recently returned from a trip to Alaska and across the country to prepare data on housing needs. He combined an extremely active professional career with a long record of public service, and had held a number of posts in the Federal and state governments prior to his defense appointment. A veteran of World War I, he was a former State Commander of the American Legion and remained active in the affairs of that body. One time consultant to the U. S. Treasury Department's Procurement Division, he was a charter member of the National Association of Housing Officials, designer of the first slum clearance project to be carried out under the U. S. Housing Agency, and a former President of the Texas Society of Architects.