Planned Obsolescence?

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Former head of American Motors George Romney recently wrinkled a few architectural brows when he announced that the only way to meet the future's need for adequate housing was by the put-up款式 housing on an assembly line basis. Now Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Romney believes that unless production can be made expensive enough, literally millions of Americans will soon be without craftsmen for each separate moment to the plight of the building trades, Romney was roundly booed when he announced that they end practices that increase building costs, and begin giving more construction jobs to minority groups. This is a stellar example of what may prove to be Romney's major impediment, for a program such as the one he advocates would require an industry known for its backwardness.

Rising Cost

Complicating the problem is the rising cost of labor, land, materials and interest, and thus the nation is more than 10,000,000 units short of its needs. Romney proposes a cooperative effort by public officials, private builders, and labor unions to start building proto-types of dwellings for the poor by mass production methods. Architects are apparently not the only people concerned at the prospect of mass-produced housing. In a recent speech before 3,000 delegates from the building trades, Romney was seen outmoded city wish to pay for individualism and self identity. Jone & Laughlin Steel Corporation of Pittsburgh and Donn Products of Cleveland have merged to form Jal-Donn Modular Buildings, Inc.; they produce right-hand and left-hand units of steel apartment house modules which snap on side by side and can be stacked three stories without added support. Average cost: $14,000-$17,000 for a dwelling unit, and it gets lower all the time. Average erection time of unfinished units 1½ hours.

Only Solution

But where does all this leave the architect? Not out in the cold, as some may think. Romney's ideas seem to be the only feasible solution at the moment to the plight of the poor, but this plan still leaves room for individual design. Many people cannot and do not wish to pay for individual design anyway, and they too must be housed. But not everyone will be satisfied with identical units, and this is where the architect comes in.

Residential modules will supposedly come in as many parts as are needed to suit individual taste, and an architect will still be required to plan the overall design of a house, whether it be a simple two - bedroom dwelling or a mansion utilizing modular innovations only an architect could design.

This leaves the architect leeway, within the framework of the basic units, to continue his services as a creative designer for his client. Architecture is indeed an eternal art; and, like everything which makes a true contribution to our society, must change to meet society's needs.