

Our Changing Economy

New Frontiers Hide Same Old Problems

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BY 1970 our solar system will be filled with expanded satellites. Special towboats will be needed to capture derelicts and keep the flight paths clear.

The American Bosch Arma Corporation, which says it's in the vanguard of the race to outer space, has alerted me to this future traffic problem and vividly illustrated, in a full-page advertisement, how trained crewmen will attach lines to a radar-detected satellite. The text explains how the towboats, "driven by electro-particle propulsion," will switch their engines to full reverse, break the dead satellite out of orbit and send it in a spiral toward the Earth, to be consumed by friction in the heavier atmosphere . . . No recharging of batteries, no salvaging—just the old Navy treatment, "Overboard."

My first awareness of this emerging traffic problem in outer space gave me pause. All last year, I was worrying about the traffic congestion on Shirley Highway and other petty problems: The deterioration of the District's central business area, the developing slums in Maryland and Virginia and unemployment among Washington teen-agers. How remote these old problems seem as "we stand today on the edge of a new frontier—the frontier of the 1960s."

Moving Out and Moving On

Those problems of the old frontier will be dealt with, I suppose, in the traditional American way—by "moving out" and "moving on." What song or legend praises him who stays at home to keep store and care for aged parents? What poet or newspaper editor ever achieved fame deploring the irresponsibility of young men in escaping the mess at home by moving to some new land of opportunity?

We in Washington, however, are in a unique situation. The New Frontier has come to us, so we can't quite forget all our old problems. But we can follow the lead of the Board of Trade and be content with just deploring them.

The important thing is the growth of Washington that's likely to occur in the coming Era or the New Frontier. More Government agencies; more R & D firms. New industrial plants on the fringes of those long airstrips at Chantilly. Big real estate deals, more shopping centers and more garden-type apartments without gardens. More people, more jobs, more everything; that's progression — some say "progress."

Washington may outstrip all other cities in rate of growth during the 1960s—if only we don't stand in the way of "progress" by insisting on solving old problems before encouraging industrial development.

Dismayed and Afraid

Space exploration and "crash programs" on all those other problems of the New Frontier of science will be expensive. More people will be needed in Washington to install telephones, make out vouchers and to write and file memoranda. Then too, as Charlie Brown recently discovered in a moment of fateful decision, "this world is filled with people who are anxious to function in an advisory capacity." Many of these people will be coming to Washington after the turn of the year.

How wonderful to be in Washington at this glorious moment in history—especially when the call "to be pioneers" is "to the young in heart, regardless of age, to the stout in spirit."

Yet I confess I am dismayed and a little afraid. I do not thrill to "the promise of more sacrifice" for more missiles and faster jets. Getting to and from work has taken a good deal out of me and I'm a bit disgruntled by being awakened at 6 a. m. on Saturdays and Sundays all summer long by scores of helicopters skimming my rooftop as they shuttle from the Pentagon to Ft. Belvoir and back—perhaps because the fairways of the Army-Navy Country Club in Arlington have been so crowded . . . I'm not the frontier type, not one that likes to be up at the crack of dawn.

It may sound trivial and bourgeoisie but I had hoped that in the 1960s a few bright young men and women would be spared to work on old problems: To devise a less expensive way of making tennis and golf balls, to design a bathing cap for women that doesn't leak and to invent more comfortable seats for the new stadium than those in Griffith Stadium—especially now that the Nats take four hours to play a single game . . . Then too, I had hoped that some attention might be given to improving the food of Washington restaurants, the taste of City water, the content of TV programs and perhaps even the design of new buildings.

Yes, I know that somewhere in "the uncharted areas of space" that one presidential candidate talks about, future astronauts may discover a planet without noisome trucks and noisy helicopters—where tennis balls are cheap and the pastry delicious, where there's no broken glass on the beaches, and where mountain springs are unpolluted and the hours all sunny and gay . . . But, that I should live so long!