

Scientists envision 21st century

January 17, 1967

A future in which man's preoccupation with survival may finally give way to preoccupation with ways to make his life more pleasant was envisioned by a panel of scientists in a symposium on "January 29, 2001" held at the University of California, San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Such far-out adjuncts to the good life as smog-free automobiles, artificially extended shorelines increasing tenfold the available recreational beaches, computerized housework and routine transplants of healthy organs for damaged or diseased ones were seen as possibilities.

Participating in the January 14 symposium, at the invitation of Dr. William A. Nierenberg, director-of Scripps Institution, were:

Dr. Robert A. Charpie, president, Electronics Division of Union Carbide Corp. and former assistant director of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Professor John Isaacs, acting chairman, Department of Oceanography, Scripps Institution.

Dr. Thomas Malone, vice-president of the Travelers Insurance companies and the chairman of the United States National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Hilliard W. Paige, vice-president and general manager, Missile and Space Division, General Electric Co.

Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner, provost, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and former assistant to the President for Science and Technology.

The symposium, held in connection with the premiere of the new "The 21st Century" program on the CBS television network Sunday, January 29 (6:00-6:30 p.m., PST), was moderated by CBS news correspondent Walter Cronkite, who will be the principal reporter for the television program. The series is being sponsored by Union Carbide Corp.

The panel of scientists placed as much stress on the problems to be faced on Jan. 29, 2001, as on the gadgetry man will have at his command. Dr. Malone noted the possibility that the smog-free automobile powered by electricity would be controlled less by the driver's wishes than by external agencies, as a safety measure.

"We won't be able to recognize automobiles," he said. "And the drivers will have to surrender their freedom to go here and there." He also noted that car interiors are likely to be designed for safety and to bear little resemblance to those of 1967 automobiles.

One of the primary concerns of the panelists was man's adjustment to his own increasing numbers. A world population of more than six billion was predicted, and transportation, city planning, food production methods and social problems were considered as among the most vexing-- and some of the most promising challenges to a teeming world.

The panel was optimistic about man's ability to feed himself-- taking more food from the sea and utilizing vast areas of land that now is wilderness-- and to accommodate a population that will nearly double itself in the next 34 years.

In this connection, Isaacs remarked that people "really think they are crowded because they all live together in cities," and pointed to vast uninhabited areas in countries such as India and Brazil, regions that carry almost no population and that contribute very little to the human race."

"There have been estimates that there is plenty of food for six billion people and maybe from more than one source," he said.

Transportation, already a problem as highways and freeways are increasingly clogged by automobiles, will be less necessary to individuals as communications techniques improve.

Cities may be designed, according to Dr. Wiesner, as long thin communities stretched out along high-speed transportation lines. Dr. Charpie predicted nuclear power will have all but displaced the burning of fossil fuels as a source of power, and power generating stations may be installed in the sea to carry away excess heat.

Hope for smog-bound Los Angeles was expressed by Paige, who noted that someone had figured out that a 60-megawatt nuclear power generator placed on top of nearby Mt. Wilson would generate enough heat to raise the Los Angeles basin's inversion layer to a height of 19,000 feet-- eliminating smog and making the area beautiful.

The certainty of increased leisure time and the possible reduction of the work week to three days evoked a forecast of a time when work can be made so enjoyable that people will want more than three days' employment, possibly undertaking second jobs whose express purpose is the improvement of man's condition throughout the world.

The future of space travel received some attention as Paige predicted exploration of the solar system by the 1980's-- but no commercial travel to the planets by 2001.

"But we always tend to be conservative in thinking about the future," he said, "and I hate to say it won't happen."

The computerized household of the future may lead to a device, according to Dr. Charple, that can call a golfing housewife on the seventh green to tell her she forgot to program the evening's dinner-- and Dr. Wiesner suggested that the smog-free, electric car of the future may include a safety device that shuts off the motor if the driver has alcohol on his breath.

The panel was held in the Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics, while visitors, including correspondents from many parts of the country, listened over closed-circuit television in nearby Sumner Auditorium.