

Chrysler move to suburbs sobering



DAN MCCOSH

I've always believed that urban sprawl was invented in Detroit, not in Los Angeles. Los Angeles merely got the credit, like they got the credit for Hula Hoops.

Regardless, the Detroit lifestyle, expressed in the pattern of highways, development and housing, has inescapably changed the way most Americans live.

What distinguishes us here is first, growth, the kind of growth that bulldozes and abandons as well as pumps hope into people's lives.

Mainly, however, it is growth of industry and commercial development that precedes most of the people and housing it requires to maintain it.

The great myth of Detroit is that its suburbs were formed by people fleeing the travails of the inner city

— ridiculous on the face of it when you realize the suburbs have 80% of the population and are still growing.

To paraphrase Chairman Lee, Detroit's growth starts out in cornfields.

One could blame Henry Ford for all this, unless you ignore the previous pioneers that marched all the way out in the country to Mack and Woodward to found a catalog seed company.

But mainly, the auto companies built out in the middle of nowhere, in Dearborn, Flint, Lansing, or the GM building on West Grand Blvd., two miles from where the town houses ended.

In my lifetime, it was projects like the GM tech center, Northland Shopping Mall (the first big mall in the U.S.), and the Saline, MI plastics plant — huge blocks of commerce in the cornfields.

Land was cheap, utilities plentiful, and transportation easy. It was an odd formula for big incomes, short commutes, big laws, easy shopping and a cultural wasteland.

Not many art museums in those cornfields.

The lifestyle is invasive today, and we are not about to turn it around.

Was it an accident, the result of economic engines pumping away silently out of control?

Sort of, but it also was the result of a pattern of real estate taxes, subsidies, and policies that encouraged it, giving the inside players each a share of the pie.

Chrysler's decision to move its headquarters from Highland Park to Auburn Hills was driven partly by its huge appetite for land, but also by the realization that the state was offering huge real estate tax subsidies to do so — not to mention current and federal money pouring in for everything from corporate depreciation allowances to an intelligent vehicle highway system in North Oakland County to handle the traffic.

There is, of course, no tax or obligation to clean up the mess left behind.

Witness the \$200 million in public funds, plus tax subsidies, it took

to clear the site and keep the Chrysler Jefferson plant where it was — a facility less than half the size with low-paying jobs compared to the Auburn Hills technical center.

I am not altogether sure it is the role or responsibility of a corporation to do anything other than to take what it is offered.

In fact, tying the fate of a local community to the vagaries of an international corporation is ridiculous on the face of it.

Instead, it would be reasonable for the public agencies that make these policies to take note of their impact, and at least work towards a tax policy that is more rational.

I wrote these thoughts after deciding I was being a bit flippant in my first reaction to the carefully feigned surprise at Chrysler's decision to abandon Highland Park and head north.

The issues deserve more sober consideration.

Then, of course, Highland Park starts a petition drive to put slot machines in the old Chrysler design center. "Nuff said."

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Unions from page 1C

"We have a corporate campaign going on now," said Manogian, who represents power plant operators, cable splicers, substation operators and meter readers at Edison.

"We're exerting pressure on top management to let them know we're not happy. We're trying to force them back to the bargaining table."

How?

"Home picketing," Manogian said. "Let's face it, that's an embarrassing situation to be put into. Neighbors get upset."

The union also has petitioned to intervene as an interested party in rate hearings before the state Public Service Commission.

Edison recently imposed changes in benefits and working conditions this summer after declaring an impasse in bargaining.

Knox and the Teamsters have

waged a similar battle since a half dozen beer distributors imposed wages and conditions in the spring of 1991.

"Every time we find any function individual distributors are involved in, we get out there," he said. "In one case it was the wedding of an owner's son. We held a mock wedding outside the church."

"We went to a class reunion for one of the employers... (and) demonstrated in neighborhoods," Knox said.

The union also has gone out of its way to monitor expiration dates of beer shelf life, he added.

Effective or not?

Some academics like Elizabeth Barkley, chairwoman of the department of management and marketing at Oakland University, wonder

what personalizing the negotiations adds to the overall process.

"That doesn't lead to that better relationship," she said.

The unions ask — what other choices do we have?

Then there are boycotts.

Newspaper Guild employees in the Adams unit (Macomb Daily and Daily Tribune) have coordinated an advertising and circulation boycott while staying on the job.

"Our people are still working, collecting a salary, but they can take action that's very effective in getting a company's attention," Jackson said. "I think companies get nervous when they see you the employees, you the union, reaching out to people."

Guerrilla tactics generally take longer to prompt action than strikes, labor leaders concede. But they press on while working the po-

litical process to make the hiring of permanent replacements illegal during a strike.

That practice has been available since 1935, but rarely used until President Reagan fired striking air traffic controllers.

"Prior to 1980-81, when Reagan fired PATCO workers, you never heard of it or it wasn't publicized," Manogian said. "Companies were hesitant to use it. When the president invoked it, he gave companies the go-ahead."

"We've got to have that striker replacement law revoked," he said.

"If I were in a union with the new climate and atmosphere, I'd be worried about calling a strike," Barclay said. "If you're willing to go on a strike, there's certain risks associated with doing it. In the current climate, there is no guarantee or implied guarantee of coming back."

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