

at its roots through progressive *ad valorem* land taxation and by sustaining a high rate of economic growth to shift the poverty margin downwards. This, however, has yet to be appreciated by most politicians of all parties.

Meanwhile, with good intentions and poor economic understanding, more and more interventionist policies are proposed. The familiar rag bag of minor modifications to irrelevant action looks as if it will persist for a long time to come, although it may change its superficial appearance over the years. The sale of public sector housing, increased grants for rehabilitation, more public acquisition of vacant houses and new forms of tenure like equity-sharing

will have only marginal effects where the natural allocative bonus of the market place has been disregarded for so long and where deep-rooted monopolistic characteristics of the land market are firmly entrenched. If my readings of the trends are correct, the next major housing policy proposal from this Government will be to use Community Land Act powers and public finance to "write down" the values of acquired land. The Americans have already travelled in that direction and found the financial consequences disastrous.

"Tax the land and not the buildings" is still a worthy slogan. Let us hope it will never be forgotten. It will always have relevance to housing policy.

rents have been depressed. Now however, there are signs of a slight recovery. But with all the Government's fooling around with planning and fiscal policies, and with its land nationalisation and development charges, not to mention the concealed but inexorable effects of economic laws, the poor land speculator doesn't know which way to jump. He has dipped into the community's land-rent chest before and burned his fingers.

The Government is at present very concerned about the inner urban areas that are run down, soulless and economically unbalanced. Without a single thought as to its own contribution to the problem, which was consistently to ignore or dismiss the right steps, it is now busy trying artificial respiration with more of the taxpayer's money. Urban aid expenditure on selected inner city areas is to be increased by £95 million this year as a step towards a commitment of £1 billion over the next decade. Office Development Permits are to be raised from 15,000 to 30,000 sq. ft. and Permits given to a limited number of speculative office buildings in inner London.

To whatever extent the exodus from London and other cities has been a result of the Bureau's activities, the fact is that firms were moving of their own volition anyway. To give space to a clerk to work in the City of London it costs an average £2,674 per annum including rates. Office workers take a dim view of commuting these days, what with the swingeing increases in fares and unreliable and uncomfortable transport facilities.

Maybe if the latest policy fails a Grand Plan will be devised with a computer-controlled office and population transfer grid. Every engagement and dismissal in the cities would be fed into the computer as would every office letting or vacancy. Office workers with their desks would then be transferred in coaches and vans on a weekly basis to preserve an equilibrium decided upon by planners as the ideal. After all a precision computer-planned chaos must be better than the old-fashioned human brand we have now!

## Political Acrobatics

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**I**F you make mistakes you don't just admit them and attempt to rectify them. You justify your original arguments and then find new ones for putting the mistakes right under the guise of a new policy. This is standard Government philosophy. See an evil—pass a law. If this creates another evil—pass another law. If the laws conflict and tie lawyers, laymen and administrators in knots, why, then you pass a consolidating act leaving a few crafty loopholes that counsels' opinion will find for those concerned—at a price.

Of course the wrangling will continue over what the appropriate action of our rulers should have been, missing the point that no action at all was the right action in most cases.

Londoners will be familiar with the large posters on the hoardings, the underground railway and in the press in recent years, exhorting firms to move out of London. The Location of Offices Bureau, set up twelve years ago to "encourage the decentralisation of office employment from congested central London to suitable centres elsewhere", was backed by subsidies and inducements of many kinds. But now the Government wants the offices back again. It was all a mistake. Well, not exactly a mistake—you see there is a new policy. The Bureau is not to be

wound up, it is to be used to promote office employment in city centres and in case not enough firms come back, it is to encourage foreign firms to establish offices in Britain. This of course is definitely not a reversal of policy—Mr. Shore, Secretary of State for the Environment, says it isn't and what more could you want? Accusations of somersaulting, making a U-turn or back-tracking are quite unfounded.

The Bureau is now to "offer advice on the location best suited to the particular firm in question, whether in an assisted (subsidised) area, an inner urban area or elsewhere."

So whether you are assisted, cajoled or intimidated to move in or out of London, the Bureau is there to advise you what to do. And that advice, I seriously suggest, should be listened to very carefully by firms contemplating a move. A farmer, asked to what he attributed his exceptional success, replied that he listened carefully to government advice—and then did precisely the opposite.

Of course, the whole thing could be a plot to confuse land speculators or to encourage them. What with the claimed success of the Bureau in getting 120,000 office jobs moved out of central London and the slump reaction to the speculative property boom, office