

**I**N A SOCIETY with a few owners of large land holdings, occupied by a large number of tenants and landless workers, community development is greatly restricted in what it can accomplish according to a United Nations study on *The Relationship Between Land Reform and Community Development*, prepared for the World Land Reform Conference held in Rome, June 20—July 2.

One of five UN studies on various aspects of land reform prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the report points out that wherever the great majority of farmers have had a very insecure hold on their land or have been obliged to give most of the produce to the landlord, community development agencies "have understandably come up against a general lack of interest in the use of fertilisers, better tillage and soil conservation on the part of all the but the prosperous owners."

A definition of the difference between land reform and community development is given in these terms in the study: Land reform is associated mainly with the problem of ownership, possession and operation of land as an instrument of agricultural production. Community development is concerned with the general improvement in the level of living of the local community. The two are complementary, the report states. Land reform is often a pre-condition for successful community development; community development, in turn, mobilises and organises popular efforts to ensure the attainment of the objectives of land reform. The report stresses that land reform includes more than just land tenure changes and ordinarily involves a succession of steps extending over considerable periods of time.

In a comment on preparing the way for land reform, the report points out that, although there are instances of land tenure reforms originating at the top, it is usually true that strong local support is needed even to obtain the enactment of land reform legislation. "Such local support," the study states, "pre-supposes some occurrence capable of overcoming some of the apathy and demoralisa-



tion into which peasant societies tend to sink after generations of living without incentives, oriented mainly toward mere survival." Something must give the rural people a measure of encouragement, self-respect, self-confidence and a desire for progress.

In a section on securing enforcement of land tenure legislation, the report emphasises the need for a strong social consensus organised at the community level in rural areas. Otherwise, with the balance of knowledge and resources heavily in favour of entrenched owners of large blocks of land, implementation would probably bog down.

# World Conference Land Reform

THE UNITED NATIONS STUDIES I.

The study cautions against attempts to move large numbers of people great distances to form new colonies in the wilderness without strong governmental assistance and community organisation; against slow and inefficient granting of legal titles which often results in the farmer holding back his efforts to produce; and against a land redistribution system that does not set reasonably high minimum holding limits so as to avoid inefficiencies frequently associated with farming conducted on a very small scale, even when the best production and marketing techniques are used.

The UN report concludes that a substantial degree of co-ordination of programmes and agencies is required—difficult though it may often be to achieve—if land reform is to support community development and *vice versa*. "Community development can help to obtain and enforce land tenure reform legislation, promote the success of resettlement schemes, and in various ways educate and organise for the higher agricultural productivity which is necessary unless land redistribution is to constitute a social victory followed by an economic defeat. The two movements, therefore, need to be geared together."

The need to relate agrarian reform directly to employment policy is the theme of the document *Gearing Agrarian Reform to Employment Objectives, with Particular Reference to Latin America*, prepared by the International Labour Office.

Land reform in the past, says the paper, has often failed to take account of the overall employment needs of the agricultural population, with the result that benefits to some workers have been obtained at the expense of others. The carving up of big estates, for example, has in some instances displaced wage-workers previously employed on them in order to provide small holdings for peasant families. In some cases the new farms have been too small to support even the families to which they were allotted.

The document is essentially a study of the situation in Latin America. After quoting statistics to show that in most countries of that continent land resources are adequate for the current agricultural work force, it poses the question, "Why then are these countries faced by serious problems of under-employment and unemployment in agriculture?" The answer lies in the system of land tenure—too few families supported by the big estates; too many trying to live off small farms.

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## PROBLEMS



It is estimated that in the region as a whole less than ten per cent. of the holdings contain 90 per cent. of the land. In Chile and Peru more than 80 per cent. of the land is taken up by the larger farms, defined as those that employ twelve or more man-years of labour, and even in Argentina, where land concentration is lowest, the figure is not far short of 40 per cent.

On the other side of the coin are the *minifundistas*, the small producers, tenants, sharecroppers and similar categories of agricultural workers whose holdings are insufficient for the full employment of two man-years of labour, and the completely landless labourers. They range from 60 per cent. of farm families in Argentina to 88 per cent. in Guatemala and Ecuador.

Many of these occupy farms which cannot support a family. For example, in Colombia it is estimated that sub-family farms, with less than five per cent. of the land, contain almost 60 per cent. of the active agricultural population. At the other end of the scale, large units, with about 50 per cent. of the land, employ barely four per cent. of the work force.

Not only is the land badly distributed. The report points out that the poverty of the small farmer means that adequate equipment and irrigation works, where needed, are also denied him. This aggregates the vicious circle. The output per worker in large farms in Colombia, for example—mainly because he has more land to use, but partly because it is more efficiently farmed—is roughly one hundred times that on sub-family farms. In Latin America as a whole it is about sixty times.

The report recommends that the workers now cultivating sub-family farms should become operators of family-sized units, members of land-use co-operatives, or wage-labourers on medium-sized farms under some sort of profit-sharing arrangement. The new farms should be carved out of the large holdings. Some of the *minifundistas* could remain on their present plots, expanded as their neighbours moved away to the new lands.

The report argues that in all these situations the workers would require additional aid. In most cases credit and marketing facilities would be required, as well as technical assistance. Government would have an important role, but the farmers could also play a part themselves through co-operative and similar organisations.

(Comment follows)

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THE U.N. LAND REFORMERS appear—from the background notes on the papers presented at the Conference—to be approaching the subject of land reform mainly from the point of view of economic efficiency. If farms are too small they must be amalgamated; if too large they must be subdivided, but efficiently run large estates should be left alone, as should state-run enterprises (presumably, by assumption, always efficiently run). Urban land is outside the programme altogether.

No-one would deny that much good can come from the breaking up of large landed estates by the creation of a class of peasant proprietors, but three observations must be made. (1) A proper land reform must include *all* land, and not just certain agricultural land. This is particularly important as industrialisation and urbanisation grows. (2) The problem is essentially a moral and not an economic one. (3) Redistribution of land is not the best way to tackle the problem.

Admirable as the UN proposals are, compared with accepting the *status quo*, difficulties can be clearly foreseen, and have in fact arisen in practice wherever this kind of land reform has been tried. In the first place, regarding land reform as only an agricultural problem presents an artificial situation—re-settling the existing agricultural population on the existing area of agricultural land. This ignores the possibility that either the number of workers or the area of land is too great or too small.

This is not a matter that can be determined by planning techniques but one that can be decided only by the operations of a free market, and for this to be effective there must be no barriers to non-agricultural employment. Such restrictions inevitably exist where non-agricultural land is subject to the same kind of ownership that it is proposed to seriously modify in the agricultural sector.

The fact that existing large estates that are well run and that provide employment for wage labour are not to be affected (as suggested in one of the papers) emphasises the “economic” outlook of the land reformers. As long as the large estates, urban and rural, are left untouched,



the division of the people into rich and poor will not only be maintained, but as productive power increases the disparity will become greater. It is perfectly possible to have economic efficiency, of the kind envisaged, and still retain a quite unjust distribution of wealth.

Finally, whether or not land reform is to be thorough it cannot be achieved by a redistribution of the land. What is needed is a redistribution of the rent.

To achieve the equality of opportunity that will allow none to subjugate others and to achieve the greatest

economic efficiency nothing more complicated is required than the recognition that the land is the common birth-right of all mankind—and the collection of the rent of land for the community is by far the best economic way of acknowledging it.

R.C.G.

## A Planner Hits Out



A letter by JOHN KELSEY in the *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*

I HAVE BEEN so immersed in planning and its daily running that it is only recently I have stepped back and had a look at the results, and find that I don't like where it's going.

Planning is becoming inhuman. The one-time art and craft of town building and countryside management is being reduced to that sterile science of the economics of land use. The goals in planning seem to be designed to satisfy overspill targets, ever-sinking cost ceilings, time limits, minimum land acquisition boundaries and a host of political expediences, with populations worked out to .3 of a head and areas to .17 of an acre.

The tools we use for this soulless job are a set of pre-conceived figures of population density, plot ratios, and various items of provision calculated on a per head basis, and formulae of all descriptions which we believe, if multiplied by today's situation, will give us the picture in five, ten, fifteen (you name it) years' time. The fact that we can change patterns of the future by action taken today seems to be denied, if not forgotten. Design is reduced to a road width, a plot depth, a recommended Ministry standard or "the module," whatever it may happen to be at the time. And as a sop, to ourselves as much as anyone, plans are said to be Buchananised and/or landscaped.

The so-called human sciences seem to come in somewhere, but of course they don't carry much weight; after all, there's not much return on capital from contentment is there? Who will calculate the value to Britain's economy of a sunlit view at breakfast time, a seat on the train to work, 45 decibels instead of 75 . . . ? Recommendations, intended only as guiding lights to the designer, have changed into blinkers restricting his vision and emasculating his art.

Town planning, and development plan and control in particular, appears to be based on conditions surveyed today and documented yesterday. Thus the highest objectives it can hope for from such a base can be but those generated by reaction. They must, of necessity, always be one jump behind tomorrow. What is needed is an attitude of mind that is in fact one jump *ahead* of tomorrow—enjoying the prospect and anticipating its

advent. And so, instead of using its negative powers of restriction to repulse "non-U" or "contemporary trends," town planning could be a creative and pioneering voice beckoning and calling—offering carrots and sweetsies, bribing the investor of today to play ball.

What is needed, I suggest, is a picture of the future: a strong framework, clearly stated, into which all the various aspects of our life could fit—give or take a bit. And furthermore, I suggest, computer planning, with its disciples, system, trend and economy, will not give us this picture. The picture can be likened to the meal that owes its piquancy solely to the chef and that little *je ne sais quoi* in its preparation. The mere ingredients, though measured, weighed and prepared are not enough. Oh for the return of the brilliant guess, the imaginative hunch, that flash that turns the commonplace into a work of art!

We planners have become gutless. We are afraid to fight the administration, to stand and say "This will be fine and beautiful—because I say so." No, we must back it up with fact and figure, and anything that cannot be so justified is left out. To be subjective, to feel something to be sound, gives cause for mirth. Mistakes, quite naturally, are bound to be made, but we are scared to take the consequence, to carry the can, and be thought a fool. And so, in defence, we play at planning, with our endless researches, surveys and analyses, and diagrams of theoretical urban forms. We digest and redigest yesterday's facts and the very vapours of this pointless process cloud the vision.

Let us have some professional pride. Let us have sufficient conviction and confidence in ourselves to stand up for what we feel to be right (proven or not) and to insert into our plans those peculiar and light-hearted items of nonsense, chaos and extravagance that made our pre-planning towns both exciting and exasperating; those very same items, in fact, that contemporary planning techniques knowingly eliminate.

### PUERILE PLANNING

THE problem of the ever-growing city can be tackled only by examining the fundamental causes of city growth and not by placing some sort of girdle round it in the forlorn hope that it might be permanently contained.

To ignore this is to produce land planning strategy at its most puerile, the futility of which is further emphasised by the contradiction it raises. First, no 'wall' has ever yet contained a city, for there has always been some sort of permanent overflow. Secondly, if peripheral restraint is employed, one may ask for what purpose.

The only distinction in this country between town and countryside is one of density of occupation—a sliding scale of people and uses that decreases outwards from the city to a point where it begins to increase owing to the influence of an adjoining town. Therefore, what is the purpose of a 'wall'?"

—"Pragma," in the  
*Journal of the Town Planning Institute*