



Cities for Tomorrow

By P. R. HUDSON

"Every land use problem has a land rent problem"

DURING the last fifty years a relatively few people have influenced the course of political thinking.

Towards the end of the last century a few far-sighted people expressed concern about the evolving pattern of urban development arising out of the Industrial Revolution. A number of social reformers, including Shaftesbury, Rowntree, Dickens, and Wedgwood, firmly believed that the poor and miserable conditions in which the working classes had to live, work and spend their limited leisure had a considerably bad influence on their thinking and behaviour. A little later these voices were joined by those of architects and town planners such as Ebenezer Howard, Burham and Geddes.

These men considered that the future development of the country would be greatly conditioned by the standards that were set during their lifetimes, and, acting in what they believed to be the best interests of future generations, they resolved to press for a raising of those standards. Their influence has been slow but remarkable.

More remarkable perhaps is the political support that has been given to town planning in the last few years. Although there are differences among them, the support given to the control of development by all three parties suggests that land use planning is with us to stay.

The recent publication of a Bow Group pamphlet* illustrates the views of the younger Conservatives. Taking as his starting point the expected U.K. population increase of nearly two-million by 1971, and possibly twenty-million by the end of the century, Timothy Sainsbury traces the growth of the key urban areas that reduced the population of other parts of the country from 50 to less than 30 per cent of the total between 1801 and 1937. The population increase now forecast is the greatest and most rapid of any period. At least another 100,000 opportunities for employment will be required by 1971. In addition, about three-million houses need to be rebuilt or modernised. In Merseyside alone, 200,000 people will need to be re-housed outside the built-up area as the slum clearance programme for the next twenty years progresses. All political parties have agreed a national target for house building of 500,000 a year.

The decline of the north east and north west of the country because of changing industry, and the growth of the south east and Birmingham regions, poses consider-

able problems of decay and loss of revenue on the one hand and increased congestion and costs on the other.

Mr. Sainsbury argues that only by increasing employment prospects can the declining areas be rejuvenated and made more attractive. "The full effects of economic decisions," he writes, "are not always susceptible to individual analysis. In spite of arguments in favour of a minimum of interference in the natural play of economic forces, special stimulants to economic development in areas that might in the short run seem unattractive can be justified."

Bringing together the threads of population growth, housing needs, unemployment and land requirements for industrial expansion, Mr. Sainsbury concludes that there is an urgent need for the designation of new "growth areas." These, he considers, should be planned as new cities, or rather groups of new towns, to accommodate populations of half-a-million. Preferably they should be sited within eighty miles of existing centres.

Mr. Sainsbury emphasises that barriers to population migration, such as rent control and subsidised housing, must be broken if the new cities are to receive the necessary private capital investment and if the resistance to mobility is to be overcome. In conclusion he wrote: "We should not seek to stabilise the distribution of population any more than we should seek to stabilise the pattern of employment between industries. It is necessary to provide locations where employment growth can be encouraged which are attractive as places in which to live and work. Movement of population is not necessarily a bad thing and growth of population need not be feared. If, however, we are to make a significant improvement in our environment and to ensure a more even spread of prosperity throughout the country, then we must plan."

A reading of this booklet indicates that land use planning and economic direction is likely to figure prominently in future Conservative policy. The individual will be given plenty of opportunities for choice within a planned framework if the Bow Group has its way.

It needs to be stressed, however, that unless land use planning on the scale envisaged is supported by a realistic approach, progress will never be made at the pace required. Such concentrations of population as are expected will give rise to rapidly rising land prices. To ensure that land is used at the right time and that speculation does not inhibit development it is necessary to institute a direct policy of site value taxation.

Mr. Sainsbury should recall that every land use problem has a land rent problem at its base.

**The Need for New Cities*, Bow Group Pamphlet. C.P.C. 2s. 6d.