



Dr. Alice Coleman in Tower Hamlets, a London borough where she estimates that one-sixth of the land is wasted thanks to the influence of planners. . . .

NATURE-LOVING folk who prefer the verdant elegance of Hampstead or Blackheath have always looked down their noses at the East End with its treeless streets, slum terraces and dreary greyness. They will doubtless be relieved to learn that between 1964 and 1977 the amount of what the town hall brigade term "tended open space" (parks, football pitches, council grass) rose in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets by 134 per cent. One person, however, will not be joining in the general euphoria.

The lone dissident voice which is about to be raised above the hubbub of self-congratulation emanating from Tower Hamlets' Planning Departments belongs to Miss Alice Coleman, a forthright middle-aged academic from London University. Dr. Coleman, who would close down every planning department in the country if she had her way—"planners have merely worsened the problems they were invented to solve"—has strong views on Open Space. She believes it should be covered with houses.

"Since the war we have been brainwashed by the planners into thinking that open space is a marvelous thing. It's like motherhood. Everyone always thought that was wonderful until the population explosion made some people think again," she says.

Dr. Coleman is Reader in Geography at King's College, and Director of the Second Land Utilisation Survey of Britain, a mammoth project which will involve the drawing of some 6,500 maps. She is currently involved in taking Tower Hamlets' planners to the cleaners at the invitation of a firm of planning

Alice in Blunderland

consultants who have been called in by the council.

"The planners say: 'We must have a football pitch for the kids,' so they pull down rows of old houses. Why? So the children can learn to become football hooligans? "I think we are an over-leisured society. Children don't need to be playing all the time," she says.

"They would find it easier to become integrated into society if there were little factories and workshops near where they lived, instead of all this council grass. Then they could go and watch and maybe earn a bob or two—be responsible, self-reliant."

Dr. Coleman thinks Tower Hamlets should build more homes—houses with gardens, not flats—on their open space. "But they shouldn't demolish the flats until they've built the new homes. In this country it's always been the other way round and we've had a housing shortage. In fact, the flats don't need to be demolished. Why don't they move the people out and let them as office blocks? The City is crying out for more office space."

NICOLA TYRER TALKS TO THE ACADEMIC WHO ATTACKS THE PLANNED WASTE OF LAND

Dr. Coleman believes people in Tower Hamlets do not like public open space. They would prefer the land divided up among them for gardens. The borough's riverside walk, which arose out of the death of the docks, is an example of a leisure amenity Dr. Coleman believes local people didn't particularly want.

"Tower Hamlets can't afford to have so much land lying around not working for its keep. The planners should have seen the warning signal when the docks began to run down. But they deliberately got rid of industry to create the walk," she says. "Now they are trying to get jobs back to the area, but those firms that stayed are paying huge rates. Some have had eight-fold increases, because there are fewer firms to share the burden".

Dr. Coleman and her team have calculated that nearly one sixth of the land in Tower Hamlets is being wasted.

"The council argue with our figure, saying they have plans for some of the land. But they agree that there are no plans for eight per cent—acres of space where they have pulled down houses, apparently for nothing. There are bits of waste land all over the borough. There's no reason why small, private estates shouldn't be built there for people who work in the City.

"But Tower Hamlets Council has always been hostile to private developers. Only three per cent of local people own their houses, and there is a strong philosophy on the council that it is almost immoral to want to buy your own house."

Dr. Coleman also believes there is too much routine distaste among planners for slums. "There was this great mass thinking: 'Pull down the slums. Clear the people out of the city centres to estates in the country'. "But what has that achieved, apart from carving up our much-needed farmland"

"I don't think the so-called slums are that bad. I don't believe we should always pull them down, and certainly not until we've solved the housing shortage. The evidence is that people were happier when they lived in their old terraces, with their own front door and their private yard or garden. Communities thrive and there was less delinquency. Nationally we are currently destroying 90,000 homes a year. Why? To keep planners in work largely."

Dr. Coleman and her team are now testing the link between crime and certain types of council architecture in Tower Hamlets, based on the findings of the American scholar Oscar Newman.

Newman discovered that once a block was over seven storeys high there was a jump in the juvenile crime rate. He also established that big estates with a lot of public territory—grassland, roads, open balconies, overhead walk-ways—had the highest crime rates, and that there was a similarly high rate in blocks where ten or more homes could be reached by one entrance.

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Beaubush: agent expelled by RICS

ESTATE AGENT Chris Smith has been expelled by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors for his part in the £7m. Beaubush land affair.

In 1972 Lionel Brooks sold the 617-acre Beaubush Estate in Sussex for £3.25m. One of his advisers was Smith, a partner in the firm of Weller Eggar. Part of this land was then sold to Crawley Council for £7m. Smith received a personal share of the profit, and was expelled for "conduct unbecoming a chartered surveyor."

◆ABOUT 70% of upper floors in town centre buildings are left idle, researchers revealed at a conference organised by Bristol University's extra-mural department and the Design and Industries Association. Sixty delegates—many of them town council planners—examined the reasons for this massive under-use of space, and considered ideas aimed at bringing it into residential and commercial use. (Bristol Evening Post, 14.4.78)

FARMLAND OWNERS

FINANCIAL institutions own about 500,000 acres of Britain, according to Lord Northfield, chairman of a committee set up by the Government to investigate the ownership of farmland. Other institutions, including the Crown, ministries and Oxbridge colleges together own 10 times as much. "We have no evidence of huge foreign buying," said Lord Northfield. He agreed that more estates in Scotland were being sold to overseas buyers than in the rest of the UK. (The Times, 13.4.78)

'TAX LAND VALUES'

THE LIBERAL Party's West Midlands Council want changes in the tax system so that workers pay little or no tax on wages and salaries. The Council agreed a five-point response to a discussion document launched by the Party last year. They called for reduced income tax through a massive increase in the level of income at which tax is first payable. And they said that the long-standing Liberal policy of land taxation should still be advocated as a major source of Government income. (Liberal News, 4.4.78)

◆SOCIALIST China has invested £14.4m. in a £22.2m. Hong Kong development. The People's Republic has bought part of the Causeway Centre's four-storey podium and a complete residential tower in the complex, which is now being built on the tiny off-shore capitalist island.

NEWS DIGEST

THE REIGN of Keynesian economic theory in the political realm of counter-unemployment policy should long be over.

Experience world-wide has demonstrated that somewhere in Keynes' analysis there is a fundamental flaw. Yet, to date, there has been a lack of a concise and coherent treatment of Keynes indicating in detail the point at which he went astray and the road he should have taken to attain full employment equilibrium. Until some other answer to the problem of depression gains acceptance, the Keynesian system will prevail, in spite of its evident shortcomings. The arena of economic orthodoxy, then, is wide open to anybody with a plausible and workable alternative proposal.

This is doubtless the reason for the publication of a book by A. R. Cannon.* Mr. Cannon is, by present-day standards, commendably brief in his analysis, not through any aversion to meeting economic orthodoxy on its own ground over important detail, but rather through an avoidance of padding. Consequently the book tells the reader what he should know and is at the same time enjoyable to read.

It begins with a brief review of depressions and various theories advanced to explain them. Keynes entered the picture at the point at which it became clear that the recognised classical economists had little to offer in ironing out the periodic "hard times." He maintained that for various reasons it periodically happens that the money interest rate rises relative to the falling marginal efficiency of capital (the return from the employment of capital assets) thus making investment unattractive and leading to depression.

Keynes suggested that if the money interest rate could be induced to fall along with the marginal efficiency of capital, then investment could still remain attractive and depression be averted. He reasoned that, since the interest rate is the "price" of money, an increase in the quantity of money would automatically reduce the interest rate. He foresaw that there was a limit to the reduction of the interest rate by this means and proposed that at times when

RAY LINLEY

Depressions and the Keynesian solution

the marginal efficiency of capital continued to fall below this limit, the state would have to undertake huge public works if unemployment were to be avoided.

Cannon points out that Keynes failed to recognise the significance of the behaviour of land prices in times of boom and slump. He suggests that when land prices are rising quickly, they tend to pull the interest rate up with them, though not as steeply due to differences of liquidity. Further, speculation in land during a boom drives land prices up faster than the rent yield and the "rent rate" falls below the interest rate. At this point, says Cannon, money lenders and would-be land buyers become cautious. Land prices poise and then begin to fall. Depression and deflation have set in. Cannon gives his remedy for this phenomenon—the "nationalization of rent." He then demonstrates

that, in certain circumstances, Keynes' assumption concerning the effect of variations in the quantity of money upon the interest rate is absolutely wrong—as experience has indeed proved.

I have concentrated upon what most interested me in Cannon's work, but there is much more of interest in this little book. One might here and there be tempted to take issue with him upon less important points. And at first glance the book might appear a little pricey in terms of depreciated sterling, as limited edition works inevitably do when compared with mass-marketed products. But the author is to be congratulated upon producing a concise and readable thesis which should be compulsory reading for all who consider themselves political economists.

***Depression, Inflation and Employment,** A. R. Cannon. Available from *Land & Liberty*, £2.30 plus 12p postage.

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"We have mapped out Tower Hamlets using four of Newman's categories and discovered that ten per cent. of council-owned homes in the borough have all four of his top disadvantages. One block has 576 homes which can be reached from one entrance," says Dr. Coleman.

She and her team have already decided, on the basis of Newman's findings, which blocks they expect to have the worst social problems. "Now we are going to the police and the housing and welfare people to see if they tally up. The results will be fascinating."

The ultimate solution to the housing crisis, in Dr. Coleman's opinion, is to abandon planning and return to something more resembling the free-for-all that preceded the first Town and Country Planning Act of 1947. "All we've done, with our planning departments, is create an awful, national

bottleneck of decisions. The backlog of waste land is growing and growing. The situation is going from bad to worse."

Where Tower Hamlets is concerned she believes local people should have more choice in the type of housing they can obtain. "People in the borough have little control over their lives. Their home is something that is allocated to them.

"There are plenty of alternatives to subsidised council tenancies—self-build homes where a couple buys £6,000 worth of materials and builds their own home; nuclear housing, where a very small, cheap house is built so the couple can add onto it as the children arrive. . .

"It is high time Tower Hamlets Planning Department put the ability to control their own lives back into the hands of the people."

◆ *This article is reproduced courtesy of the Evening News, London.*