



LAND USE PLANNING

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"Our current environmental and resource problems are hardly the result of following a *laissez faire* philosophy, they are rather the result of monopoly power."

NUMEROUS problems connected with land use and natural resources have come to a head. Matters that have long been brewing, such as urban sprawl, environmental pollution, the energy crisis, seem to be hitting us all at once.

We had thought of the automobile as an unmitigated good, with more and more of them as a desirable goal. Now they are suddenly looming as an enemy of society and we find that we have so neglected most other forms of transportation that we do not know which way to turn.

There is widespread fear that we are using up resources faster than they are being replaced and there is a demand for government to play a more active role in conserving resources and planning the use of land.

In the last election in the U.S., voters in many parts of the country were asked to consider bills relating to the environment: more public transportation, control of pollution, land-use planning, etc. The voters wanted to see the environment improved but were understandably reluctant to pay the high cost of many of these measures, via bond issues, higher taxes, etc.

The Government appears to be vacillating between a course of action and inaction. Some feel that the Government already has too much power and should not be given more in order to control the use of land. Others feel that the Government is now a weak follower of a consumer society and should take a stronger stand for the common good.

Planners in various bureaus at the Federal level would like to see an overall national plan for the use of land and the conservation of resources, contending that local and even regional plans are not

enough since they could conflict with one another.

In New York State and surrounding areas, various quasi-public agencies headed by such powerful figures as Robert Moses and William Ronan, have exercised such domination that we cannot feel encouraged by this example to give even broader powers to a Federal agency.

At issue are differing philosophies of dealing with the land-use problem, and we cannot settle the matter without resolving which philosophy we are going to follow. There is a whole spectrum of courses of action to choose from, ranging from simply turning a person loose on a resource and letting him do as he pleases, to assigning him to do a specific job on a specific location. An example of the former is going out in a boat on the ocean to fish; and of the latter, where a worker as in Red China, may be taken from a city job and sent to a farm commune in order to till the soil. And there are all sorts of gradations in between. What we will do depends a good deal on our premises.

One school of thought contends that such things as land use must be centrally planned for the good of society; people cannot be left to their own devices or they will go on a rampage, as witness the current crisis.

But our current environmental and resource problems are hardly the result of following a *laissez*



faire philosophy, or any philosophy at all; they are rather the result of a grab for monopoly power. Nor

should it escape notice that many of the problems have been compounded by governmental deeds and policies.

Deserving of more attention is the philosophy that states that the greatest good to society comes from the liberty of the individual and equal rights to all. Essential to this concept is the equal right to the use of land. This is a point that is too often overlooked by planners. As opposed to the planning philosophy, this freedom philosophy would make the maintenance of equal rights the chief function of an over-all policy — an item also overlooked in a monopoly society.

Interestingly, a good deal of the freedom philosophy was practised by the early American colonists. A group of people would settle in a designated area, allow each member an area of land sufficient for his uses and reserve an area for common use.

What we need today is a land policy that allows the individual freedom in the use of land with due attention to the common good. Both purposes would be served by imposing a minimum of taxes and regulations and calling for the payment of rent to the community via the taxation of land values.

Something will have to be done about our land and resource problems — it might as well be the right thing.

Planners' Parable

WALKING through the jungle, a lion spied a mouse sitting sadly by a bush. So he asked the mouse what was wrong. "I am so small," the mouse replied, "and all the other animals look down on me."

"Then," said the lion, "I can help you. Just stop being a mouse and be a lion instead." The mouse was very grateful. "I shall certainly do what you suggest," he said. "But how do I stop being a mouse?"

"That," said the lion, as he walked scornfully away, "is for you to decide. I formulate the policy."