

ONE OF the crucial questions of today is that of natural resources. Much concern has been expressed about the present and future supply of petroleum, fish, timber, arable land, even good water and air.

A recent book* explores some aspects of the problem—particularly the struggles of various parties to control and benefit from the resources in question.

Daniel Chasan looks at controversies involving salmon fisheries, Indian claims to land, water power and irrigation, the public domain and farm land near cities. In each of these areas the victory usually goes to the most powerful economic interest. Questions of fairness or future consequences rarely win out.

One intricate controversy is that of the North Pacific salmon fisheries with at least three conflicting national interests, the U.S.A., Canada and Japan. It involves the rivers where the fish spawn and the oceanic water where they migrate. (The fish are unaware of national boundaries.) Another is the matter of diverting waters of various rivers to irrigate dry areas, leading to sectional conflicts.

In these and other areas it is clear that some sort of public policy needs to be worked out. Some compromise has to be reached that will attend to the needs and interests of the different parties concerned. There is such a thing as short-term interest. Most private producers are interested in using a resource—even using it up—in the interest of turning a quick profit. Well and good, but some resources have been thereby exhausted—such as some species of trees and animals. A long-term interest, bearing the public well-being in mind, the equal rights of all and future generations, is also needed.

In many of the cases cited by Chasan, the public collection of the rent of land would enormously improve the situation. For instance, one of the problems mentioned is that of cities steadily expanding, urban and suburban sprawl that gobbles up good farm land, while arid and inaccessible

*Up for Grabs: Inquiries into Who wants What, by Daniel Jack Chasan. Madrona Publishers, Seattle. 1977. \$4.95.

ROBERT CLANCY

PUBLIC POLICY AND THE POWER STRUGGLE FOR NATURAL RESOURCES



land is pressed into cultivation by expensive and controversial irrigation. The sprawl is aggravated by land speculation (a fact noted in the book). Land value taxation is designed to discourage such speculation; thus sprawl would be contained and it would be possible for good farm land located near cities to continue in agricultural use before inferior land were used.

Admittedly there are some resource problems that may require special study. Says Chasan: "The more one moves from generalities to specifics, the trickier they become. It is easy to philosophize that society's resources should be

used prudently. It is not easy to say that the prudent use of this hundred acres should be defined by society—possibly represented by some unelected, well-paid and securely pensioned bureaucrat—and not by the person who has bought and paid for it. But unless society does define prudence, albeit within stringent limits, the future will be up for grabs—or will be shaped piecemeal by the economic decisions of those who have already grabbed."

Specific solutions might be easier to come by if they were arrived at by closely observing the principle that all men are equally entitled to the bounty of nature and testing policy accordingly. (Bureaucratic decisions on prudence might then not seem so necessary.) Granted that powerful economic interests are ready to oppose this principle. Mr. Chasan admits he cannot answer that question—and it certainly is a mighty tough one!

MERRIEWOLD: MERRY MEMORIES

THE LATEST book by Agnes de Mille is *Where the Wings Grow* (Doubleday & Co., New York, 1978, \$8.95), fourth in a series of autobiographical volumes.

This one deals with life at Merriewold, a rural retreat in upstate New York discovered by Agnes' grandfather Henry George. A community of remarkable people developed there. Not the least remarkable was Agnes' mother, Anna George de Mille, remembered by old-time Georgists.

This "memoir of childhood," as it is subtitled, explores freshly and poignantly the happenings, mem-

ories and feelings encountered in Merriewold, and describes the different folks, sights, smells and sounds with a sharply clear style that brings one close to them.

This is the ninth book by the versatile Miss de Mille, who has gained fame as "the first lady of the dance" in America—choreographer, dancer, writer, lecturer, organizer. In all her autobiographical works she speaks of her illustrious grandfather and his philosophy. He would be proud of her.

R.C.