

Zoning — Another Volstead Act?

WALT DISNEY'S contribution to his time was immeasurable. Because of his success and his integrity he was the bidding enterpriser selected by the government to develop California's Mineral King in the Sierra Mountains. The good news leaked out in 1964—a perfect demonstration of how free enterprise can function successfully on publicly owned land. The effort will be well repaid by the favorable results destined to occur.

However, in Three Rivers, a town some 35 miles from the development, a good backfires into an evil, observed W. E. Pereira, Los Angeles correspondent — and under our present system of taxation, using archaic laws, the "evil that men do lives after them." For land speculation and all its attendant evils have so impregnated the minds and hearts of the people that friendships of more than a quarter of a century were broken, people who have been friends all their lives are fighting, and a county supervisor said, "you are not the people I used to know, this battle has changed you into something to be ashamed of."

It is reported that realtors moved in and property began to change hands with prices soaring in some cases to five times what they were a couple of years ago. A 37-acre parcel sold three years ago for \$80,000 was resold for \$459,000. One acre was sold to an oil company for \$40,000. Another parcel of 27 acres sold for \$75,000 three years ago, was resold for \$127,000, and six months ago was sold again for \$235,000. It is said to have a market value today of \$500,000.

The County Director of Planning

feels a plan is urgently needed. Zoning was proposed, but there was no master plan to follow. As to zoning, we could categorize it as another case of the evil that we do which lives after us. A cousin to speculation and fellow-traveler with it on the road to inflationary disaster, Wolf Van Eckardt wrote in the Los Angeles Times, October 9, 1966:

"Zoning is somewhat like prohibition in its day; it is a noble experiment that has failed. As an act of government, it was meant to assure virtue, but zoning invited the vices of bribery and profiteering.

"Worse, it plainly has not curbed the country's current binge of rampant, reckless and ugly urbanization. This is a fact that must be faced if we want to stop not only the increasing corruption of suburbia's local governments but also the increasing pollution of our land.

"Yet while we read quite often about a builder or local official (who obliges by being both at the same time) making zoning deals, we read far too little about the intricacies and inadequacies of the zoning game itself. It is time the discussion got started."

Is it any wonder that following a wave of rampant speculative rises in land prices, labor and capital, already heavily burdened by taxes on their honorably earned fruits, cannot afford to invest themselves? The umbrella of protection makes land speculation legal. Like zoning, it seems to be an experiment that failed, because not taxing land values heavily denies the most natural source possible for revenues to communities.

The battle with the slum began the day civilization recognized it as her enemy. It was a losing fight until conscience joined fear and self-interest against it. When common sense and the golden rule obtain among men as a rule of practice, it will be over. The two have not always been classed together, but they are plainly seen to belong together.

— Jacob A. Riis