

THE COST OF TOWN PLANNING

IN AN article in the *Observer* (24th May) Sir Charles Bressey asserted that despite the zeal of civic authorities "few town planners would claim any decisive success for their efforts to improve our densely congested urban centres. The expense is prodigious and the machinery painfully cumbersome. Claims for compensation by individual owners affected are tangible and substantial; the counterclaim of the local authority for betterment is shadowy and elusive." The consequence is that progress is slow and little result is to be seen. Sir Charles refers to a case told to him by the clerk of a local authority "where within his lifetime compensation had been paid on three separate occasions for the setting back of one and the same shopfront in order to enable three successive street widenings to take place." Sir Charles goes on to say: "The outright purchase of the entire site in the first instance would obviously have saved a large outlay of public money, besides making a valuable addition to the civic assets." It should not be forgotten, however, that the purchase would have made an equal addition to the civic debt. The case mentioned is by no means typical, and does not provide a basis for the general proposition.

Sir Charles says: "Generally speaking, it is in the very core of our cities that this drastic replanning is most urgently needed and has been longest deferred, owing partly to treasured historical associations and partly to the high value conferred upon land by the demand for sites in so favoured a position." Historical buildings can usually be preserved by being suitably by-passed, but that frequently necessitates

the acquisition of more valuable land. It is the high land value which is the decisive obstacle. That is not going to be removed by a wholesale scheme of municipal land purchase. On the contrary if small purchases of land are so expensive and burdensome, large purchases will merely multiply the difficulties. This is not a case of taking a hair of the dog that bit you, but of inviting a hundred other dogs to bite you also.

Pursuing this line of thought Sir Charles adds: "There was never so favourable an occasion as the present for the compulsory acquisition of these rights [of ownership] by the municipalities, and with the nation in its present mind there is no reason to suppose that Parliament would impose terms of purchase likely to jeopardise civic prosperity." It is curious how prevalent is the idea that a time when the national debt is increasing by leaps and bounds is a favourable time for adding another huge amount to it or to the municipal debt. The present is far from being a "favourable occasion." And what does Sir Charles mean by terms not "likely to jeopardise civic prosperity." Are the owners to be paid less than the land is worth? Or is it expected that the state will subsidize the municipalities?

The interpretation placed upon Sir Charles Bressey's suggestion by the Lord Mayors of a number of large cities was made evident in the *Observer* of 31st May. The Lord Mayor of Birmingham said that "the local authority should be granted complete powers over all sites—indeed over all land in its area, and also the requisite financial credit to purchase and

develop it as required." What the Lord Mayor means by "financial credit" is not disclosed, but it is fairly clear that he thinks it is something which will save Birmingham from footing all the bill. The Lord Mayor of Bristol is more explicit: "Ownership by the municipality will enable the best schemes to be evolved, as, indeed, they can be, provided the National Exchequer will bear a proper part of the cost of acquiring areas suitable for planning to meet the needs of the future." However, the Lord Mayor does not explain what is the measure of the "proper part" which the State is to bear. The Lord Provost of Glasgow goes still further: "I am in general agreement with Sir Charles's point of view, but I would add that the facilities for replanning would be furthered and the local authority helped in its decision to replan areas in rebuilding if the whole cost of the buildings and sites required for clearance were met from national funds without charge to the local ratepayers." It now only wants some one to come forward and say that these projects would be furthered if the whole cost were met from international funds without charge to ratepayers and taxpayers.

When will our well-meaning public representatives wake up to the fact that the high land values which are the bane of all public improvements are created by the community, are brought into being and maintained by public expenditure? The first step is not to buy out the landlords, but to make land values contribute to the cost of municipal government. If that were done the problem would fall into its true shape and become readily solvable.

THE ENDING OF WAR-TIME CONTROLS

A PLEA has been heard in some quarters for the continuance after the war of the present "controls" over trade and industry. It appears to be believed that there is some intrinsic virtue in these devices—that they represent an instalment of communism, socialism, protectionism, or some other social philosophy. The truth is that practically all of these controls are systems of rationing the supplies of scarce articles of consumption or raw materials. They have been brought into existence because of scarcity. Their object is to distribute that scarcity as equally as possible between the consumers of food and other necessities, or to secure that supplies of raw materials go to munition factories instead of for civil production.

The reason for the scarcity is, of course, that so much effort has been diverted from normal production to war production, and in particular that imports have had to be curtailed to make shipping available for other purposes or to make room for war-like materials.

After the war our object must surely be to do away with scarcity, and with that to do away with the need, or the excuse, for rationing and controls. The change over from war activities to peace-time activities may take a considerable time. Mr J. M. Keynes, speaking at Manchester, on 20th May, said:—

"I believe that this time it will take us three years to recover from the effects

of the war. During that period we must willingly submit to discipline—progressively less severe than in time of war, but nevertheless more difficult perhaps to bear in time of peace. After that period we can reasonably expect to obtain a measure of prosperity and health not only not less but higher than ever before. We can only lay sound foundations for that by accepting the discipline of the first three years.

"During those three years we shall have to use our brains as never before. Orderly transition from war to peace, without the disorderly demobilization of last time and without avoidable waste of labour or materials, or excessive transitional unemployment, is not going to be easy. It requires the maintenance in principle of many of the war controls and of all rationing until the actual effects of abundance of supplies prove controls and rationing to be unnecessary. We have to be full of plans, unlimited in the ambitions of our projects, but rigidly disciplined in the order and the pace of their execution. It is to be a time, I hope, such as it has not been our good fortune to enjoy for many years for the use of the political, economic, and constructive imagination."

On this we would say, even if it be granted that the relaxation of war restrictions must be gradual, let us be critical of all arguments in favour of their continuance. Restrictions of all kinds conduce

to and support monopolies. The last war led to a terrifying and destructive growth of protective tariffs all over the world, reinforced by the still more dangerous devices of quotas and controls. All of these policies were advocated as being in the public interest. No monopolist ever appeared on the public platform or wrote a letter to the press saying that he would benefit by a tariff or a quota. The argument was always that these things were for the benefit of labour, would increase employment or raise wages, or that it was in the national interest to encourage certain industries.

Do not let us be deceived. The remedy for scarcity is abundance and not rationing.

Mr Keynes in the same speech went on to say:—

"For us in this island, our economic relations with the rest of the world are the clue to all else. Great Britain, the United States, and Soviet Russia will have the task of laying foundations for world relations in which every country can without hindrance exchange its surplus produce for the goods it needs from other countries. It is a matter not of the niggardliness of Nature but of the organization of relations, honest purpose, and, above all, hard and untrammelled thinking."

We agree. It is not a matter of the niggardliness of nature. It is, however, a denial of access to the resources of