

mum frontage (which may well vary according to the value of the street) above and below which plots become progressively less valuable. Unfortunately, however, Mom-basa is not sufficiently large for worth-while research into this problem.

However, the system as used here ensures uniformity of assessment by high-lighting the most valuable portion of

each plot — *i.e.* that nearest the frontage, the part from which the greatest revenue can be derived by way of rent, and by taking into account the progressively less valuable land the further one goes back from the street.

Uniformity of assessment being a *sine qua non* of any equitable rating system, the unit foot system must be employed in any town where a site levy is made.

State Land Purchase Plan

Extract from *Signposts for the Sixties*, a policy statement
by the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party

THE case for public ownership of building land is not new. It was first made by John Stuaurt Mill a century ago. Had his advice been followed then, our cities today would be better planned and the public revenues, local or national, enormously greater — with no increases in taxation.

Since Mill made his proposals, a series of partial attempts have been made to tackle the problem—all of them unsuccessful. It is now clear that public ownership of building land is the only way in which we can expand and renew our towns and villages without being held to ransom by the landowner and the speculator.

But how shall we proceed? What land is to be acquired, and on what terms?

It will not be necessary either to acquire land which continues to be used for agriculture or to purchase the freeholds of existing houses and other buildings, so long as it is not proposed to pull them down. We can ignore, too, small sites not offered for sale, on which the owner simply wishes to build a house or garage for his own use.

We are concerned here only with land which is proposed that private building or rebuilding should be permitted. It is the price of this kind of land which has risen so alarmingly in recent years and it is the freehold of this land which should be transferred to public ownership.

It can be done most simply in this way:

A Land Commission would be set up to purchase the freehold of land on which building or rebuilding was to be authorised. Actual permission for private development would not be granted until the freehold had been acquired by the Commission, or the Commission had decided not to buy the land—for example, because the change was too unimportant to justify public purchase.

The price paid by the Commission for the site would be based on its value for its present use, together with an amount sufficient to cover any contingent losses by the owner and to encourage the willing sale of land.

Having acquired the freehold, the Commission would lease the site where it was approved for private development, on terms which ensured that the community obtained the benefit of a future rise in the value of the land. The Commission might also, in suitable cases,

follow the precedent of the insurance companies and negotiate a share in the rents of the buildings to be erected. In the normal case, since the initiative will have come from the persons who wish to develop, it should be easy for the Commission to reach agreement with them.

The Commission would also buy land required by local authorities or by other public agencies. It would then either lease or sell the land to the authority concerned. Indeed, while it would exercise general supervision, it could appoint other public bodies as its agents to purchase and hold land.

Although the transfer of the freehold of building land to public ownership would be gradual, the new system would at once stop the uncontrolled rise in land values and the exploitation of the public by the private speculator and landowner. It would also steadily increase the public revenue over the years. A fair share of this would go to the local councils and thus help to ease the problem of local government finance.

Public ownership of building land would also immensely facilitate town and country planning. At present—because existing controls are purely negative—local authorities find it almost impossible to compel a number of different private concerns to build in accordance with their plans. But when building sites are publicly owned, the authorities will be able to ensure that they are developed to a single comprehensive design—even where the development is private.

As soon as the Land Commission has been established, therefore, the local authorities should be invited to revise their planning in the light of the assistance and facilities to be provided by the Commission.

Public ownership of building land will thus remove the main obstacle to planning. But to solve the related problems of housing, transport and industrial location a series of further steps are required.

The steps listed include promotion of municipal house building, easier house purchase, municipal acquisition and modernisation of old houses, repeal of the Rent Act, more New Towns, “sensible spreading” of employment through public control over siting of offices and factories and formation of a small central planning staff to co-ordinate the plans of the local authorities and various Government departments.