

# Rise and Fall of Hawaii

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**H**AWAII, the tourist's paradise, has a grave problem. Pollution of the environment threatens to transform it from a pleasure-seeker's playground into a waste-ridden eyesore. Its once sparkling sea is discoloured with eroded soil, industrial waste and raw sewage. Swimming there now presents serious health hazards and beneath the waters vast expanses of coral reef are dying, killed by the growth of algae.

The sky above the state capital, Honolulu, is marked by a grey-brown pall. Jet airliners flying in eager tourists deposit as much pollutant in the atmosphere with each of their approximately 250 take-offs and landings a day as 10,000 automobiles. In spite of this, the car is the major contributor to air pollution in Hawaii, which has one of the highest car-per-square-mile densities in the US. Industry runs the automobile a close second in the pollution stakes. Vast quantities of sulphur dioxide emitted become sulphuric acid in the humid atmosphere and now Hawaii has the highest rate of respiratory illness in the nation. Garbage disposal, intensive use of insecticides and military activities all add weight to the problem.

The sad story of Hawaii is told by John Wehrheim, a resident of the state, in an article entitled "Paradise Lost."\* He lays part of the blame for the mess upon the state's rapidly growing population, noting at the same time that its concentration is even more significant. The importance of this latter point should not be understated. Hawaii is plagued with fevered land speculation. Mr. Wehrheim says, "The smallness of these beautiful islands combined with the rapidly increasing population and booming tourist industry, has put land at a premium. As a result land speculation has gone wild. In the last five years, sections of prime land have changed hands several times and gone up 100 per cent in market value with no improvements made. The average Hawaiian finds it financially impossible to buy land or own a home. He must lease property, usually on short terms, from one of the huge corporations. Recently many of these families have been evicted to make way for resort hotels, highways, and high-cost housing construction." The horizon of Honolulu, once beautiful with views of mountains, green palms, and oceans is now dominated by a maze of high rise buildings.

Some of the roots of Hawaii's present problems can be found back in the nineteenth century. Control of large areas of the island's land and the majority of its trade fell

into the hands of a few families, many of whom were descendants of the original New England missionaries. Legal title to the land was gained through family land grants and by deals made with the natives who were unaccustomed to the concept of private property in land. The story recalls that of England in the days of the enclosures and the Industrial Revolution for as fences went up all over the island, the old life-style vanished and the Hawaiians were forced to labour in the factories and plantations. A team engaged by industrialists in 1930 to investigate the need for new high schools in Hawaii came up with the answer that there was no need as the young people were required to work in the cane fields. "A common joke among the native Hawaiians these days is that the missionary families came to the islands to do good, and did well. Their lesson in private property is paid for bitterly and the pollution of their ancestral land has become a symbol of this lesson."

Mr. Wehrheim concludes that to save Hawaii there is need for a plan drawn up according to sound ecological principles. "Today's social and economic planning is not the answer, because an economic model represents only a small section of the environment: it takes into account only a fraction of the variables that an ecological planner would make use of. Our present economic design in Hawaii (as with most of the world) provides maximum despoliation of the environment for the maximum benefit of a very few people."

If Mr. Wehrheim seeks the solution to the island's problems in manipulating a model with more variables than are taken account of by economic planners, there is a great danger that he will become bogged down and possibly end up with an even greater mess. How much simpler it would be to clear the air a little by restoring equity in the access to natural resources. With the problem of land monopoly rectified the other necessary reforms would be made far easier to accomplish.

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## CORPORATION LAND SALE

*Worthing.* A site offered at auction by the Worthing Corporation in two lots realised a total of £166,500. Lot 1 (1.960 acres) with outline planning consent for 110 flats or an hotel and 90 flats, realised £130,000 or approximately £62,250 an acre. Lot 2 (0.193 acres), with outline consent for a petrol filling station was sold for £36,000 or £182,500 an acre.

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\**The Ecologist*, April, 1971.