

ONE WAY TO BETTER CITIES

Film Summary by Mildred Loomis

The film opens with a beautiful scene of both urban and rural setting, to give an overall look at our great country. George Romney, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, at the time, introduces the film by stating that the property tax is a powerful economic force and that as now, mistakenly, used, is a principle cause of the housing and financial disorders in our cities.

Then the film shows scene after scene of urban decay; tumble-down houses, unsightly tenements, back alleys, garbage heaps, children trying to play on crowded streets. Along with this are flashes of towering skyscrapers, beautiful mansions and luxurious living, in the same cities.

Dr. Robert Hutchins of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, is heard saying, "The property tax as now used encourages urban decay, suburban sprawl and land speculation." An owner lets his building decline because he is taxed (penalized) when he improves it."

Eugene V. Rostow, political scientist, says that due to the property tax as now used, the resulting movement of business out of urban centers means waste of public funds in premature roads, sewers, fire and police protection, houses, schools, electric, gas and water utilities.

A broadside of tenements brings a caption, "Every tenth family in the nation lives in dwellings unfit for human habitation."

Important persons interpreting and explaining points in the film include Gene Bower, president of the Southwest Forest Industries; C. Lowell Harris, professor of economics, Columbia University; Dr. Dick Netzer, dean of public administration, New York University; Dr. Mason Gaffney, professor of economics, University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee; Jim Clarkson, former mayor of Southfield, Michigan; Robert W. Jones, vice-president of Winston-Burnett Construction Company.

Dr. Robert Hutchins is seen, at the end, closing with, "To survive the crisis posed by our cities, we could remove the tax from improvements and put it on land. In this way, each man would put his land to good use; each would pay his fair share of what the community was doing for him and would not be punished for what he was doing for the community."

The film ONE WAY TO BETTER CITIES is available free from the Schalkenbach Foundation located at 50 E. 69th Street, New York City. They provide literature to accompany it including an excellent reading list and references to articles in recent journals. A discussion guide for the film is also available. The Schalkenbach Foundation also has an illustrated thirty-two page pamphlet, "This Is Our Land," republished from the August, 1960 HOUSE AND HOME MAGAZINE. Perry I Prentice, former editor and publisher of HOUSE AND HOME MAGAZINE has become a leading advocate of land-value taxation and Chairman of the Schalkenbach Foundation.