

# NATURE

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## PLANNING THE LAND OF GREAT BRITAIN

THE Bill introduced in the House of Commons by the Minister of Town and Country Planning is clearly a minor measure in fulfilment of a promise made by Lord Reith in the House of Lords in 1941 when announcing the Government's acceptance of the interim report of the Uthwatt Committee. Under this Town and Country Planning (Interim Development) Bill, planning control is to be extended to all areas in England and Wales not already subject to control; it will implement the recommendation of the Uthwatt Committee that no building or development should be permitted which is likely to be prejudicial to the programme of reconstruction that has still to be worked out.

While in this Bill, for the first time, England and Wales are visualized as a unit and planning is conceived on a national scale, including London, the measure is scarcely more than negative in character and its scope is limited. Moreover, it must be remembered that, of the half of the nation's land already covered by plans or planning resolutions, only about 6 per cent is under effective planning control. This position is due to the procedure under the existing Planning Acts being all but prohibitive, administratively and financially. The final Uthwatt Report proposed to break this deadlock by providing a solution to the problem of compensation for values disturbed by planning. Until either those recommendations or others designed to achieve the same result are adopted as official policy, the planning of the use of the land will remain an aspiration only. The obstacle presented by the difficulty of compensation is a fact that cannot be set aside or shelved, and until some proposals for dealing with it are adopted in official policy, plans for building and developing a better Britain are meaningless.

The weakness of the Government's present position was well shown in Mr. Ernest Brown's address to the National Housing and Town Planning Council in March. The one difficulty he shirked was the delay of the Government in making these vital decisions, without which neither town nor country planning is possible. Local authorities can make no plans until they and the owners and users of the land know what the principles of control are to be, and how public and private interests are to be reconciled when they come into conflict. Without that, even the emergency building and housing suggested by Mr. Brown is likely to be unsatisfactory and to conflict with the requirements of a national policy.

In housing, as in other fields, no thorough or systematic preparation for post-war developments is possible until the Government has announced its long delayed decisions on the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt Reports. The machinery is important enough—and a debate in the House of Commons just before Easter showed there is still confusion on that score—but the vital point is that the Government should indicate its broad lines of policy, for these must determine not only the extent and nature of the plans, but also to some extent the nature of the machinery by which

the declared policy is to be implemented. Sir William Jowitt's answer gave a reasonably clear outline of the procedure by which reconstruction policy is discussed and made in the War Cabinet, from the departmental level, through the two sub-committees of the War Cabinet, one of Ministers with Sir William Jowitt as chairman, and the other a special Ministerial committee set up to consider and co-ordinate departmental plans for implementing details of the Beveridge Report, to the Cabinet Committee sitting under the Lord President of the Council, which is concerned with major matters of home policy.

The outline suggests that if there is a Minister of Planning, in the sense of one with a final responsibility for the reconstruction projects upon which the Cabinet must decide, he is the Lord President of the Council, Sir John Anderson, and the adequacy of the existing machinery of government for this purpose could be very well defended up to a point. It does not, however, cover those more fundamental issues of the machinery of government in a democratic State, the balance between central, regional and local administration, which are inherent in the planning of a free society.

What is even more vital at the present time is that the machinery should be used to formulate, announce and implement the basic policies. Continued failure in this respect to adduce the proof of preparedness brings the whole present apparatus of government into disrespect to an extent which may even handicap the war effort. This danger can be clearly seen in a broadsheet "Plans for Physical Reconstruction" issued by Political and Economic Planning last December, in which the most important recommendations of the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt Reports are summarized, the action already taken indicated, the issues still remaining for decision described, and some of the wider implications of the movement for physical planning indicated. A subsequent broadsheet issued in April, "After the Beveridge Report", reviewing some of the chief problems raised by that report, makes a similar valuable contribution to the appraisal of various aspects of Sir William Beveridge's proposals.

The Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt Reports are all concerned with the physical planning of Great Britain, but from different angles, and in effect they all agree that the nation can no longer afford to allow the 'free price and market' mechanism to act as the chief regulator of the uses of the land, the location of industry, and the growth and decay of towns and cities. The market mechanism itself needs to be regulated and overridden, when the public interest requires, by a public planning mechanism which takes into account all the wide considerations of social, economic and strategic policy ignored by the market. While much of this detailed planning must be worked out and decided by local planning authorities, the three reports also agree that major decisions as to the use of land and the location of industry must be taken nationally by some kind of central planning authority, which can fit local planning schemes into a consistent national development plan and co-ordin-

ate the work of all national agencies concerned with particular aspects of the use of land and industrial location.

Such agencies are only instruments for giving effect to those parts of a wider national policy for social and economic development which fall within their sphere of action. However the instruments of control are constructed, there must therefore be, as the Uthwatt Report insists, "means by which the requirements of agriculture, transport, public services and defence, as well as housing, industrial location, town siting and other matters can be given proper weight and considered as a whole". With the nature and structure of this central machinery we need not be further concerned at the moment: obviously it must be designed to afford some solution to that question of private enterprise and public control on which Mr. Herbert Morrison and Sir Percy Harris have spoken trenchantly; and although the structure of the central authority for control of land and town and country planning has been the subject of much controversy, as indeed the three Reports indicate, its structure must be in harmony with that of the main machinery of government established to serve the needs of a democratic State in the post-war world.

Sir William Jowitt has indicated the Government's view of the paramount importance of the fullest measure of direct responsibility, but at the same time a new permanent commission with more limited functions may be attached to the new Ministry, because it would be the most appropriate body in connexion, for example, with the acquisition of development rights, while it might also be charged with the management of property and similar duties. The new Bill will strengthen the powers of local planning authorities and give them much wider and simpler powers for the compulsory acquisition of land. Lord Portal agrees that the number of local planning authorities is excessive and must be reduced, and he is encouraging them to combine to set up joint planning committees covering wide areas. He is also preparing to make available to local authorities the services of expert planning officers with headquarters in convenient centres; but it is not yet clear whether the Government is prepared to accept the Scott Committee's recommendation that the major local planning authorities should be the councils of counties and county boroughs, or a combination of local government units of equivalent importance. Effective planning of urban re-development also requires decision in the 'reconstruction areas' which are to be developed as wholes, while even a rationalized system of local planning units with reinforced powers and clearly defined tasks requires the support of national funds for the development programmes and to overcome the compensation-betterment obstacle.

That is the main reason why decision on policy is at the moment of primary importance, rather than the machinery by which policy is to be executed, and on this very issue the Government is still considering the Uthwatt Report. That report recommends one approach for built-up areas and another

for the rest of the land. For existing town areas, strengthening town planning powers to ensure really effective public control of development or re-development is recommended. For land remaining in private ownership, compensation would continue to be paid; but to offset this the Uthwatt Committee suggests that when such land is benefited by public planning, betterment should be recouped by a periodical levy.

If the development rights scheme is adopted, controversy over the proposed basis of compensation appears to be inevitable. Another controversial issue is whether, under the development rights scheme, it would be automatically necessary—as the Uthwatt Committee assumes—to acquire publicly all land needed for approved private development schemes. It may well be wise to postpone as long as possible the consideration of nationalization of the land if our objective can be achieved by more elastic methods under a comprehensive central policy adapted for change with changing conditions. Given also wise control and efficient persons entrusted generously with responsibility for local action, the issue between private and national ownership may become insignificant, as the measure of co-operation secured in such ways by the Ministries of Food and of Agriculture seems to show.

Whatever ultimate decisions are taken on these questions, larger problems loom in the background. The scale and pace of the post-war building have still to be decided, and agricultural housing is not alone in forcing the issue. The Ministry of Works and Planning, which is working on the supply problems involved, must balance housing demands against the demands for other types of constructional development. The whole building programme must then be translated into programmes for the use of land, labour supply and raw materials. Moreover, the physical plan has to be integrated with wider social and economic plans. The total demands of physical reconstruction on Britain's resources require balancing against other conflicting demands—those of the export industries, of agriculture, of the Beveridge plan, of consumers for consumers' goods, and of other countries needing assistance in rehabilitation.

From this angle alone it is essential for the Government to define more clearly its attitude both to the Barlow Report and to the Beveridge Report. Again, policies for national planning of the land, urban redevelopment, balanced regional economic development and redistribution of industry and population, ultimately require provisional national objectives for the balance to be aimed at between urban and rural life, and for the related, but by no means identical, balance between industry and agriculture. Acceptance or rejection of the Scott Committee's plea to make the countryside prosperous solely by maintaining a prosperous agriculture will be determined by the decisions on such issues.

These problems extend far beyond the scope of any single Ministry, and they demand a great deal of creative and constructive thinking and research. A Ministerial Committee working on such problems would almost inevitably grow into the Cabinet's chief organ for framing general social and economic planning

policy in its major aspects. Any such development could scarcely fail to make an expert social and economic 'general staff' for planning imperative, the need for which should already be obvious when the most cursory attempt is made to survey the vast range of interdependent problems involved.

## ECONOMICS AND POLITICS IN THE SOUTH SEAS

### The South Seas in the Modern World

By Prof. Felix M. Keesing. (Institute of Pacific Relations: International Research Series.) Pp. xv+391. (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1942.) 16s. net.

THIS book, in the author's own words, "attempts to define comprehensively the political, strategic, and economic role" of the South Seas in the world to-day. It is written in the manner of a general introduction for the non-specialist reader to a part of the world on which information is not easily available; but in order to produce it Dr. Keesing has drawn, not only on his own extensive travels, but also on a wide range of literature, including unpublished first-hand accounts, and the specialist too will find in it valuable fresh data.

After an introductory chapter describing the geographical setting of the islands and their internal and external communications, and concluding with a section on recent political developments which has unfortunately become out of date between the publication of the book in the United States and its appearance in Great Britain, Dr. Keesing goes on to discuss their economic potentialities and commercial relations with the outside world. In only three groups, as he points out, does trade with the metropolitan Power form a significant proportion of total trade—in Hawaii, the Japanese mandated area, and the Cook Islands. As significant economic trends in the period since the War of 1914-18 he notes the decrease in the number of white small-holders, the increase in production by native communities and by large-scale enterprises, and the marked growth of economic nationalism.

The short section on population is welcome as a corrective to the mystical ideas about the causes of depopulation in the South Seas that have gained wide currency. Dr. Keesing quotes the observations of field-workers who have tested Rivers' theory that native populations die out from loss of *joie de vivre*, and found it inadequate, and gives the statistics now available which show that in many areas the trend has been reversed.

A description of the characteristic reactions to culture contact leads on to a discussion of "alternatives in native policy", in which the American aim of rapid Westernization is contrasted with the British preference for a more gradual development. This divergence of views may have great significance for the future of the dependent areas in the Pacific, particularly if it is interpreted by American public opinion as a contrast between active trusteeship and neglect. It is of interest to learn from Dr. Keesing that "the wisdom of high-pressure assimilation has been questioned in the last few years". A fuller discussion of this point might have been valuable in a