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# Planning the Industrial Town

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As recently as 1700, London was the only settlement in Britain with a population in excess of 30,000. At that time, England's population (probably less than 5,000,000 in all) was split at least five-to-one in favour of the countryside—a circumstance still not untypical of many lands. Since then, however, Great Britain has charted a course in urban development that sees her still among the leaders in the field, now with the whole world seemingly hell-bent on overtaking her.

From 1801 to 1901, the population of Great Britain quadrupled: from about 10,000,000 to nearly 40,000,000. During the same time, the rural: urban split was reversed in favour of the town. London in 1800, alone among the world's cities, had already passed the million mark, and by 1900, Greater London was approaching 7,000,000. By 1950, England, the most urbanised country in the world, had 80 per cent of her population living in places with 2,000 or more inhabitants. Over half her population lived on one-fifth of her land area—a belt extending from Kent to Cheshire. Today, nearly one-quarter live within daily reach of London. And today, London is not unique. She is no longer even the biggest. New York and Tokyo claim over 13,000,000 each, and are among several metropolitan "world-cities" numbering multi-million populations. A recent report (*The Times* April 24, 1973) reveals that Sao Paulo in Brazil, for instance, has grown from 600,000 in 1935 to 8,500,000 today, and is currently receiving immigrants at the rate of 150 per hour.

## The Experience of Planning

With this experience behind her, and with no less pressing problems still to be met, it is not surprising that for modern times the art of town planning has enjoyed in Great Britain a unique development. No history of the subject, no textbook or learned review, no matter in what language, will today fail to discuss the growth of the 19th century industrial town in Great Britain, the English Garden City Movement, and the British New Towns. Other lands and other times have also much from which we can learn, but Britain's experience as the first in the field still gives a unique authority to those of her theorists

and practitioners who for nearly two centuries have tried to make sense of and control the industrial city. It needs no more than the experience of everyday life in Britain to confirm how small has been their success. And it will surprise no one that an economic system dedicated to private fortune-hunting is not the most favourable for community planning and endeavour. But planning and endeavour there have been, and among the general failure, some success. The most significant achievement, however, is in the realm of theory, and from this, as it has developed and is still developing, and defective though it undoubtedly is in many ways, something may be learnt.

Contrary to what may be supposed, modern industry and factory production is not at first typically an urban phenomenon. The first mills, being water-powered and relying on local raw materials, had necessarily to site themselves where these were to be found, and therefore as often as not in rural surroundings. Since however their operation required the concentration of workers under one roof, and since time and energy were unprofitably lost by over-long journeys-to-work, the provision of workers' housing alongside a factory was not uncommon. Throughout Britain there still stand numerous gaunt clusters of mills and terrace houses, many of them now absorbed into towns.

## One Industry Towns

As the size of enterprises grew, so did the size and complexity of the building works required, and by the mid-nineteenth century it was not unusual for a capitalist to found a "new town" comprising factory, warehouses, offices, shops, schools and church as well as homes for himself and his employees. An outstanding example is Saltaire (now a suburb of Bradford) built to a unified plan for Sir Titus Salt beside the River Aire. Model towns associated with large industrial enterprises have been built in many lands. From time to time they have been held up as shining examples of capitalist philanthropy.

Engels, in his *Housing Question*, wryly remarks the case of Akroyd, the founder of Akroydon near Halifax, of whom it was said by his "less philan-

thropic competitors" that "he loved his workers, and in particular his female employees, to such an extent that . . . he ran his factories exclusively with his own children!" Engels also emphasises the advantages a shrewd capitalist would gain from this apparent "philanthropy". ". . . the English factory, mine and foundry owners had had practical experience of the pressure they can exert on striking workers if they are at the same time the landlords of those workers." It was for pressure of this kind that the "model" town of Pullman, Ohio, was later to become notorious. Company excesses in combating a strike by tenant-employees of the Pullman Car Company in 1894 led to the intervention of the US Supreme Court and half-hearted legislation to moderate the worst features inevitably implicit in the "company town."

The development of the "one-industry town" reaches its climax towards the end of the nineteenth century in the mining, shipbuilding and similar towns typical of the North and Wales, which have since become notorious for the additional evil of chronic mass unemployment, and today pose severe problems associated with their general economic decline. More typical of the recent past however has been the industrial city with numerous factories drawing from a common pool of labour, and with a supporting complement of commercial, professional and "service" undertakings. These could hardly be planned by individual capitalists, however philanthropic, and consequently, like Topsy, they at first "just grew".

It was not long, though, before the diseases inevitably associated with overcrowding and insanitary conditions began to take an alarming toll, and to threaten the better-off with contagion. As a result, from the 1840's a series of Public Health Acts empowered both national and local government to regulate the worst excesses of property speculators, and required municipalities to install proper drainage and water supply. The capitalist state was obliged to take over from individual capitalists the rudimentary duties of town planning. Official town planning in the United Kingdom has ever since reflected its sanitary origins, and until recently was regarded mainly as an aspect of public health.

During the second half of the 19th century there developed also a "town planning movement" with a bolder perspective. Except in terms of spas, fashionable residential quarters, and grandiose schemes for boulevards and processional ways, town planning as it had been known and practised throughout thousands of years of civilisation was in Britain a dead art in the early years of the Industrial Revolution. The experience of the past in any case had been in terms of fortifications, handicraft production and commerce. Apart from one half-completed essay in pre-revolutionary France, no

architect had ever turned his hand to the design of the factory town. The factory itself, and its associated utilitarian works, were by the fashionable architects themselves regarded as unworthy of their art and dismissed as "mere engineering". It consequently fell to others to propose solutions for the urban problems posed by the new methods of production.

### Owen and the Utopians

The first outstanding figure is that of the Welshman Robert Owen (1771-1858). This remarkable man had from a humble beginning risen by his middle 'twenties to the level of managing director of a spinning mill, and because of the success of his unusual methods and theories was—although an outspoken socialist—listened to with respect. Widespread unemployment had followed the ending of the Napoleonic Wars, and Owen proposed the founding of numerous industrial villages throughout the United Kingdom wherein those otherwise unable to find work could build prosperous communities based on co-operative production in their mill and surrounding fields. A similar but less-convincing proposal was made at about the same time by the French socialist Fourier, but in spite of numerous experiments in both the old and the new worlds, these early schemes, conceived in terms of a single enterprise and an island of socialism in a capitalist world, were bound to fail.

The ideal however persisted—especially among socialists—and throughout the 19th century the theme of "Utopia" had taken such a hold that Marx and Engels by the 'forties were using the name itself to characterise that tendency in working class political theory which stood in opposition to their own. But we should not overlook the warm regard in which they held the pioneering work of Owen and Fourier, applauding their trenchant criticism of capitalism and their vision of the better society modern industry was making possible. The theme of the perfect industrial city is kept alive throughout the whole of the nineteenth century. By the 'eighties and 'nineties the fictional Utopia was becoming something of a vogue among socialist propagandists, and a notable exchange took place between Edward Bellamy, who wrote *Looking Backward* and William Morris whose *News from Nowhere* was prompted in reply. From the standpoint of British town planning, Bellamy's book was significant also in that it stimulated the pioneering work of Ebenezer Howard, who, in 1898, published his proposal for "Garden Cities" as "a peaceful road to reform".

### "Garden Cities"

A direct link can be established between the new towns which in Britain are still being built, and the Garden Cities of Letchworth and Welwyn which Howard was to pioneer in the opening decades of the

twentieth century. The success of his ideas lies mainly in their timing. By the turn of the century, greater state intervention in town planning was inevitable. While factory chimneys continued to belch smoke over nearby slums, widespread public transport was providing the means whereby towns could expand and was at last making it possible for homes to be placed well away from workplaces. The era of suburban expansion—in which we are still living—had begun, and had brought with it a host of problems: new sewers, new water mains, new traffic jams, and the growing remoteness of the inner city from its rural hinterland. Also by this time, the slums which the first flush of industrial expansion had thrown up in the old city centres, and which in spite of protest still yielded profitable rents, now had to be cleared to make way for the new railways, roads and offices required to serve the business needs of the modern industrial city.

### The "Free Market"

During the period up to 1920, the provision of workers' housing had for the most part been undertaken by private builders and landlords, who with their financial backers reaped a steady harvest in the best traditions of capitalism by letting out the meanest apartments and houses for the highest rents the market would bear. As *laissez faire* and the small enterprise gives way to modern monopoly and the reign of finance-capital, a limited number of super-cities begin to grow and to coalesce into our modern "conurbations". In these circumstances, a "free market" in housing produces the intolerable conditions which still blight the lives of millions, and the demand for houses at fair rents becomes a central and perennial theme in domestic politics.

State intervention eventually becomes inevitable. Rent control—the first measure to be adopted—is outside our immediate interest here. In terms of town planning, the most notable result is the housing estate, which in the period between the wars became the typical town planning answer to contemporary problems. Amid green fields, cottages and cottage gardens attempted to recapture the rural virtues which the modern city was believed to have destroyed. There were even those who saw in the municipal housing estate, with its municipal ownership of land and buildings, yet another gradual road to socialism along which Ramsay Macdonald was to lead them on and on and on and up and up and up. Needless to say, the monopolists who relied upon a plentiful supply of cheap labour reasonably near at hand, saw no threat in the investment of state funds to provide homes for their workers. And if as a result excessive rents were kept in check, that gave yet another excuse for keeping wages low. Nonetheless, the planned cottage estate was a vast improvement upon slumdom.

The planned suburban expansion of a town inevitably involves decisions concerning the size and whereabouts of new shops, schools and other "community facilities". It is inevitably a minor exercise in town planning, and this is reflected in the borrowing from Howard's Garden City Movement of the term "garden suburb" which came to be attached to municipal housing estates. The setting of parcels of land for this use or that leads also to the "zoning" of land—around the town at first, then within its built-up boundaries—in order to have some unified control over the general pattern of future growth. "Use-zoning"—the capitalist substitute for social ownership—is now firmly established as a major component of British planning legislation, and is the basis of capitalism's negative alternative to positive planning: "development control".

### The Suburbs

The suburb was regarded for some time as the answer to most urban problems, but by the thirties the continued outward growth of cities was causing widespread alarm because of "ribbon development" and the loss of open countryside. Sprawling cities with six and seven figure population were posing unprecedented problems, and solutions such as those Howard had advocated began to receive widespread support. In its essentials, his scheme was one of decentralisation: the breaking down of the super-city into a city cluster, each part of which would be a separate entity, divided by open country from its neighbours and with its own industry and social facilities. These separate garden cities would never be allowed to grow beyond 30,000 or so, and would be interconnected by "rapid transit". At the centre of each would be a park, and in each all industry would be banished to a peripheral belt. The land would be purchased at agricultural values and kept by the city fathers under one ownership in such a way that most of the enhanced value consequent upon development eventually accrued to the community as a whole. In the decentralised old city itself, parks and public buildings would take the place of slums, and further growth would take the form of additional "daughter" cities.

There were also those, largely inspired by ideas from overseas, who urged rather the wholesale reconstruction of the city into new multi-storey forms capable of containing huge populations within a manageable area. In practice, there was a shift towards flat building in the 'thirties, but this was more as a consequence of profiteering in land than of theorising. Quarry Hill Flats at Leeds is one of the few examples of a municipal housing scheme planned to prove the superiority of continental socialism and the city-centre flat over the folksy Fabianism of the suburban cottage. But they were

built at a time of pinch-penny economies and, denied the social facilities planned as an essential complement to the flats themselves, they have served mainly to confirm the deep-seated preference of the English proletariat for his house and garden.

### Towards Giant Cities

By the outbreak of war in 1939, town planning in theory at least was developing apace, and during the war itself a number of notable advances were made. New plans were published for Coventry and London, and proposals accepted for a number of new towns. A new act of Parliament was prepared, and with the post-war victory of Labour, town planning enjoyed for a short time official recognition with its own minister and ministry. The 1947 Town Planning Act still remains the basis of our planning law.

In spite of limitations inevitable under capitalism, the first new towns were a remarkable success and have attracted world-wide attention. Although for the most part sited to receive big city "overspill", they were designed not as satellites to the big cities, but as self-contained settlements. They have now been followed by others designated in the second resurgence of planning consequent upon Labour's return to power in the 'sixties. But today the tendency is to accept the super-city as an inevitable consequence of modern life, and the latest new towns are for the most part conceived as parts of large urban complexes.

The tendency towards giant cities is a reflection of the tendency towards giantism in the modern economy. One large factory replaces a host of smaller ones. "Economies of scale" are claimed for undertakings wherein the entire production of a nation's (or even a continent's) requirements for this or that commodity is undertaken more-or-less under one roof. Complex interlocking and mutually dependent networks develop. There are advantages in diversifying production within the one organisation. A computing centre, a research laboratory, an administrative headquarters is inefficient below a minimum "threshold" size, and uneconomic unless involved in the servicing of a giant organisation.

There clearly must be upper limits beyond which costs outstrip gains. But it would be reactionary as well as utopian to dream of reversing this trend in favour of the small scale industry of the past. Modern communications make it possible of course to scatter the parts of industrial combines. But they subdivide most readily "horizontally" rather than "vertically": that is, in such a way that were each part to be placed separately in a different small town, the employment available would be restricted in one place to research, in another to administration, and in another to "blue-collar" work. The evils of the one-industry town would be resurrected.

Thus from the point of view of the modern

economy, the super-city is justified. Advantages are claimed also in the range of facilities it can support—from Olympic stadia to universities—although here it could be argued that Athens, Florence and Venice in their time, with comparatively small communities, enjoyed a richer culture than does modern London, Tokyo or New York. And even today, our greatest universities are not in our largest towns.

This acceptance of the super-city is not confined to British town planning, nor even to planning in the capitalist world. Recent pronouncements of Soviet planners indicate that in the USSR also, previous attempts to contain the growth of conurbations in favour of a widespread dispersal of smaller towns, is giving way to policies which see future urban development in terms of some 80 big city agglomerations or "urban galaxies", similar in overall form, if not in size and detail, to what Howard had in mind.

### Strategic Problems

Whether justified or not, it is the reality of the city region which now faces British town planning with its most pressing tasks. While within the big cities themselves one panic measure is succeeded by another, in some of the new towns now being built a more principled approach is possible from which we may gain some indication of an appropriate strategy.

There is at the moment considerable ferment in professional thinking. On some grounds there is agreement: the city must be designed so that it can grow, and for this the dart-board form with an embedded core is unsuitable, and open-ended layouts (generally of linear form) preferred. The city must grow also at such a rate that there are no severe imbalances in the age and sex distribution of the population. (There is much pious talk also about a balance of social classes, but this is usually to excuse the introduction of "private enterprise" and high rents.) The city should develop also in viable stages, section by section, and with homes, jobs and social services always in step. There is less need than hitherto to banish all industry to one or two remote industrial zones—a more widespread distribution may be preferable.

The disagreements relate mainly to the provision to be made for traffic, and the consequences thereof. In the new town of Milton Keynes, where the highest levels of car ownership are fully catered for, everything is spaciouly arranged around a network of dual carriageways. But a snag appears. No matter how many cars there may eventually be, the majority now and for some considerable time have to rely on buses, and the proportion of a normal population unable to drive themselves about is never likely to fall much below half. So there have to be buses. But it is speedily apparent that just as the car likes the town well spread-out, the bus likes it compact. The

more people living within easy reach of a bus stop, the better the service which can be provided.

Some of the other new towns now being built highlight even more vividly the contradiction between car and bus. Runcorn in Cheshire proposes separate route systems for each in the knowledge that it is impossible to make the same road work satisfactorily for large numbers of cars and buses at the same time. It is not only a matter of conflict between vehicles. A high capacity road for automobiles is not compatible with pedestrian safety—nor indeed with any aspect of normal urban living, and it should therefore be sited away from homes and the centres of community life. A local bus route, on the other hand, is useless unless it links these places as intimately as possible. The interests of public transport and the pedestrian *en masse* coincide, while those of the pedestrian and the private motor car *en masse* are utterly opposed.

This lesson is barely yet understood in our new towns, and not at all in our existing cities. The policy here has been to make the maximum possible provision for vehicular traffic in general, and then to devise a split in the passenger load between cars and buses such that the total vehicle flow remained within road capacity. Thus either the cars or the buses would be where they were not wanted, and each would be getting in the way of the other. Needless to say, this “modal split” is to be secured by the operation of pricing policies aimed at keeping the *hoi polloi* out of the way of the managing director. Currently the vogue is for “bus only” lanes and other half-measures necessitated by the refusal to face up to the total impossibility of reconciling the private use of the automobile with the large industrial city. Tactically, it is necessary to demand that the centres of pedestrian activity be defined; that an adequate public transport system be designed to link them as directly as possible; and that all other traffic be confined to times and places where there would be no conflict with public transport efficiency or a safe and civilised environment. The implications for car ownership and usage in towns is profound, but will have to be faced. Profound too is the need to rethink public transport in all its aspects so that movement in towns becomes a pleasant social experience instead of a selfish free-for-all.

### Planning and Social Change

Strategically, the long-term solution to the problems of the super-city probably lies in the breaking of it down into what has been called a “confederation of neighbourhoods”. In each of these neighbourhoods would live a community large enough to be socially viable and manage its own affairs, but not so large that traffic and other big-city problems began to appear within it. They

would be linked by efficient external transport systems to each other and to a regional complex of factories, offices, entertainment centres and the like, so that throughout the country all could enjoy the fruits of big-city living without its drawbacks.

This brief review has revealed for each stage in the development of modern industry a typical urban plan. In the beginning, an industrial village of homes associated with the isolated mill. Then the company town and the single-industry town. Now the industrial conurbation. Tomorrow the federation of settlements in an urban galaxy. We have moved from the isolated village to the scale of the village in the regional city. But what is technically possible, today more than ever before, looks for its achievement to the necessary changes in society which alone can bring real and lasting progress. Town planning in a capitalist Britain can never achieve one-tenth of its potential, and what it does achieve stands always at risk of being perverted to ends contrary to those that were intended. Slum clearance and comprehensive redevelopment—both in their time battle-cries of progressive town-planning—are today the excuse for urban destruction, on a scale which outstrips the Blitz, in the interests of property speculators and the British Road Federation. The division of the city into healthy communities becomes the excuse for rigidly separated class-districts and racial ghettos. The rehabilitation of homes forces rents up and the workers out.

Any discussion of town planning today inevitably leads us into wider problems of regional and national significance, where greater issues than we have touched upon await solution: population growth and distribution; local government; town and country; dereliction; pollution; fuel policy. In these matters also British town planning has an honourable heritage: especially in the pioneering regionalism of the Scot Patrick Geddes. It daily becomes more abundantly clear that the socialist planning of our resources advocated at the beginning of the industrial era by Robert Owen is long overdue, and that to delay any longer may be courting technical as well as political disaster.

### THE ALTHUSSER DEBATE

We have several contributions still in hand to the discussion of the work of Louis Althusser. We hope to publish these over the next few issues of *Marxism Today*. But the Editorial Board has decided that no further contributions will be accepted to the discussion except any concluding remarks which John Lewis and Louis Althusser may wish to make.

# Ireland—Common Cause of British and Irish People

Jack Woddis

The present crisis in Northern Ireland is basically not a problem *within* Northern Ireland but one which arises from Britain's relationship with Northern Ireland, and indeed with the whole of Ireland. That the Irish problem was primarily a British one was well understood by the Communist movement from its very beginnings; and this understanding, first voiced by Marx and Engels, has also animated the policy and activity of the Communist Party of Great Britain from its foundation right down to today.

## Marx and Engels on Ireland

The special attention given to this question by Marx and Engels, from the 1840's, when they first began to develop as communists, right up to the 1890's, is reflected in the scores of articles, speeches, letters, reports, notes and so on which they devoted to the Irish question. A recent collection<sup>1</sup>, prepared in the Soviet Union and containing over 400 pages of such documents, demonstrates strikingly the extent to which they not only studied Irish history, analysed her economic ruination by Britain, and were inspired by the age-long resistance of the Irish people, but also the consistent and principled fashion in which they worked, especially in Britain, to rally popular support for the Irish cause.

Over this entire period of fifty years in which Marx and Engels developed their views on Ireland they adhered firmly to what became a major strategic purpose of all their work in connection with Ireland, namely, to disclose that the Irish and British working class had a common interest in joining forces against their common enemy, the British ruling class, and to strive to achieve the unity of these forces in practice.

It was, in fact, in connection with formulating his ideas for the resolution on Ireland, which he submitted to the International Working Men's Association in 1869, that Marx first put forward the revolutionary concept: "Any nation which oppresses another forges its own chains".

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: *On Ireland* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1971).

Marx and Engels noted that it was the onset of the bourgeois period in Britain that led to the decisive phase in the British conquest of Ireland which Engels termed "England's first colony".<sup>2</sup> With each expansion of the capitalist system in Britain and the breakdown of feudal barriers, the Irish people suffered a further blow. As Engels commented in a letter to Marx<sup>3</sup>:

"Ireland has been stunted in her development by the English invasion and thrown centuries back".

Marx and Engels showed how the Irish people were crushed in turn by Elizabeth, James 1st, Oliver Cromwell and William of Orange. With their landholdings robbed and given to English invaders, the Irish people became "outlawed in their own land and transformed into a nation of outcasts".<sup>4</sup>

The nineteenth century saw the rapid growth of British capitalism, and just as rapid a decline of Ireland. The Act of Union of 1801 abolished the Irish Parliament, swept away the protective tariffs which that Parliament had adopted to defend Ireland's growing industries, and condemned Ireland to become an agrarian appendage of Britain.

The system of exploitation introduced after the Act of Union combined the worst features of direct capitalist exploitation with a semi-feudal appropriation of the surplus product. This system reduced the Irish people to terrible poverty. There were recurrent crop failures and famines, including the appalling potato famine of 1845-7. Some starved. Others fled across the Atlantic.

## "Business-like Extinction"

Before long a new disaster overwhelmed the Irish people. Following the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and the fall in bread prices, the British bourgeoisie sought after cheaper livestock and meat supplies. The big landlords and larger tenant farmers in Ireland found it more to their interests to turn to large-scale grazing

<sup>2</sup> May 23, 1856. See *On Ireland*, op cit p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> January 19, 1870. *ibid.* p. 286.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Engels: "Notes for the Preface to a Collection of Irish Songs", *ibid.* p. 270.