

GOVERNMENT GOES IN FOR SCIENTIFIC TOWN PLANNING

Measures of Universal Importance About to Be Put Forth by the British Cabinet at the Instance of John Burns--George Bernard Shaw Has Just Subscribed \$27,000 for a Private Scheme of the Same Sort.

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London, May 14.—This month the Right Hon. John Burns, former post-boy in a public house (i. e., hired boy in a saloon) and now one of the principal members of the British cabinet, is to introduce a bill that will be of almost as much interest across the Atlantic and on the continent as it will be in England. If it passes and works as well as the laudatory and practical Right Hon. John thinks it will, it is going to make a big difference to the next generation, and quite a lot of difference right away.

The idea is to make a science of town planning, and to put the government in charge of the job. It occurred to broad-minded Americans long ago that you can make a better and healthier, and more attractive town if you lay out the scheme for it beforehand than you can if you leave it to grow up anyhow, guided only by land speculation. Various American efforts were made in this line, and some of them highly successful, too, but it was in Germany that town planning first became a kind of science. Late England caught the craze and now the writer is informed that Mr. Burns—officially, of course, not as British Ambassador to the United States—is deeply interested, and wishes to see the latest system introduced in the United Kingdom. He has even sent a representative to England—also unofficially—to study English projects with a view to introducing prominent Americans in the great idea.

But the most significant fact is that the British government proposes to take a hand in the game. It is John Burns' hobby. He looks to it as a practical solution of many of the toughest economic problems of the day. His new bill on the subject, which will be the topic of discussion throughout England, is calculated to put a stop to all ill considered, ramshackle building and land operations, the heavy hand of government authority is to be laid upon all property management, which henceforth must be conducted with a view to the public weal, and not to individual interests.

Local authorities are to be authorized to conduct town planning operations, and the local government board, as a central court of final appeal, is to decide as to how all these measures are to be carried out. Local councils in every city are to be empowered to acquire land for town planning purposes, and even to take over compulsorily any land or buildings which they may require. If private interests are injured, it is to be compensated, but only in accordance with government ideas. For instance, should one property owner be benefited at the expense of another, the government, not the owner, is to pay the compensation. The government, not the owner, is to pay the compensation. The government, not the owner, is to pay the compensation.

The writer recently had a long talk with the Right Hon. John Burns over this new scheme of government planning. He must not talk for publication; but it is very evident from Burns' entire attitude that he looks to town planning to do wonders. If it accomplishes only half of what the president of the local government board expects the millennium is not so distant as the professional pessimist would have us believe.

One of the principal features of the bill relates to local control of housing. Under existing conditions local authorities can exert no authority either as to the number of houses per acre or the style of architecture. Up to now the housing problem has been attacked on matters of detail; but not as a comprehensive whole. Though John Burns has the credit of introducing this epoch-making measure, its further progress does not altogether depend on him. This scheme is popular with all political parties; and even if the liberal government went out of office, as there are rumors of resignation, the conservatives probably would adopt this bill. In addition to the powerful interest of the British Government, which is fostering town planning, private individuals are vying with each other to make it a success. No less a person than George Bernard Shaw has backed his faith to the extent of \$27,000 in hard cash which he has contributed to the town planning society; while Leopold Rothschild has put up \$10,000. J. S. Nettlefold of the famous Birmingham firm associated with "Joe" Chamberlain has contributed \$22,500, and written a book which makes town planning so attractive that, on reading it, one is like rushing off into the wilds and beginning something of the sort forthwith.

Another enthusiastic town planner is Miss Sybella Gurney. She has invested \$20,000 in an enormous sum for an individual to put into a venture of this kind.

Hitherto it has been the idea of the mere builder to erect square or oblong structures on square or oblong patches of ground at the rate of fifty-six per acre. These semi-cave dwellings in canyon-like streets have been let by the mere landlords at rack rents. But now this is to be changed. All future plots of ground are to be laid out with a view to artistic effect and health-giving requirements. Twelve houses per acre are deemed sufficient, and every other acre is to be devoted to an open space for children. Iconoclastic hands shall no longer be laid upon trees, nor is beautiful scenery to be recklessly demolished.

In Germany there are now no less than 715 town-planning societies, with 115,000 members. In Berlin alone there is one society which has put up 1,654 dwellings at a cost of \$6,250,000. Most German towns are acquiring all the suburban property surrounding each town site, and plotting it off into beautiful, artistic, "landscape" building lots, on which commodious dwellings are erected at nominal cost to tenants.

In England thriving settlements are now in full swing at Garden City, Ealing and Hampstead, near London, Manchester, Bourneville, Cardiff, Port Sunlight, Earswick, Oldham, Leicester, Harborne, Fallings Park, Sevensall, and elsewhere. In addition to those mentioned, six other projects are in course of formation. Before the end of the year there will be twenty towns growing up on "planned lines."

The main idea is to acquire land in the suburbs, or within easy reach of great cities, and to plot out this land in accordance with certain fixed principles of scientific procedure. For instance, in comprehensive town-planning schemes the area around a city that might be built upon within the next thirty or fifty years. Municipal authorities and private individuals are encouraged to plot out this land in such a way that wide avenues are provided for the main traffic between centers and outskirts, narrower streets are allotted for ordinary traffic, while less expensive roads and narrow drives are provided for purely residential districts. While the main thoroughfares are as direct as possible, the private drives are made to conform to artistic standards. Parks and ample open spaces are provided for before the property reaches high value; and—departing from the usual procedure—most of these parks are in what is known as the "back fence" of the residential and not in business districts.

All factories are assigned to localities on the opposite side of the town to that from which the prevailing winds blow; while railway lines and water communications are designed to tap these factories at their most convenient points of access. This takes the traffic away from the residential districts.

The future town is divided into sections, each of which is graded. High buildings close to each other are allowed in the center and on main arteries, while in the residential portions buildings are lower. Further they are removed from centers. All warehouses and business offices must be placed in the center of the town, as should also all municipal buildings, which latter are expected to be handsome and imposing in order that citizens may take pride in their corporate existence.

Probably the man who knows more about town planning than any one in England is Ebenezer Howard, founder of Garden City. There is a proposal on foot to send him to America to lecture before economic societies in St. Louis, Chicago and elsewhere.

When asked by the writer for his views he made the following statement:

"The powers given to the local government board—of which Mr. Burns is the head—are very far reaching, even to the extent of enabling them to make provisions which may suspend parliamentary enactments. The government may make provision for town planning in all places where improvements are likely to be carried out, and local authorities are even empowered to purchase lands compulsorily for these purposes. Money may be borrowed by local authorities throughout the country for the purpose of building towns in accordance with the highest ideals. Wisely administered, this government measure will usher in a new and splendid era.

"London, as it exists today, is an enormous magnet, and it might be said that the people who are attracted to this vast city, and, indeed, to all other great cities, are human needles which are drawn almost irresistibly by this great magnetic force. What we propose to do in building towns that combine the advantage of the city with the country is practically to demagnetize cities like London.

"If, with our town-planning, we can make our new cities also attractive that they form opposition magnets to London, we have solved the problem. We are not building cities but are making what we call 'Town Countries.'

"The demagnetizing of London and other big cities by forming centres of counter attraction all over England where men can pursue their lives under healthier conditions, and where they can run on what is known as the 'co-operative tenacity' principle. In this way, the land is purchased by a private association of more or less wealthy individuals, who agree not to take more than 4 or 5 per cent. on their investment. The land is

plotted with the most up-to-date ideas; and houses are built and let only to such tenants as obtain stock in the co-operative society. The tenant pays his rent in the ordinary way, but instead of its going into the pocket of an individual landlord, it is paid to the society in which he himself holds stock. In the course of time, when he has acquired sufficient stock to cover the value of his house and land, he becomes gradually his own landlord. The attainment of this ideal state is the ultimate object, the 'utopian design'—as it were—of every one who goes into the project.

In addition to becoming eventually their own landlords, co-partnership tenants have many other advantages, if they choose to partake of them. For instance, two families can take what are called 'paired houses'—that is, a single large house divided up for two families, and with a common dining room. Thus two families, by combining, may eliminate the drudgery of keeping up separate cooking establishments. One may cook for the other, or they can take 'turn and turn about.' Several of these paired houses are already in successful operation at Garden City. By combining their interests, tenants on these estates may attain an ideal state of existence which renders them superior to even co-ops and janitors.

At most of the settlements springing up all over England, the idea seems to be for the various families in any one settlement to have as many interests as possible 'in common.' Thus the houses usually in close proximity to each other, in the year, and this ground is used by all tenants whose houses abut upon it. The 'back fence' is becoming a thing of the past. In its stead one sees small wire boundaries a couple of feet above the ground. How this is going to work out where families of growing children are springing up is to be seen. But still, people with co-partnership ideals need not necessarily be retarded by such trifles as children.

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There is more than one factor in the spell which Egypt casts over the happy person who awakes to find himself on the shores of the palm-fringed Nile, says a writer in a London paper. There is the charm of the atmosphere and the possibilities of a social existence in a unique setting. To the cultured mind this environment is one of intense interest. To be able under pleasant conditions to visit day after day the colossal relics of a past civilization stirs the imagination as few things can in this matter of fact world.

By common consent the view from Deir el-Bahari is considered of unusual interest. Beneath precipitous rocks a light brown and golden tint lie the colonnades of the temple built by Queen Hatshepsut, who in the vicissitudes which beset her reign was expelled from the rulership of Egypt by her brother. Not content with this act the usurper obliterated his sister's royal cartouches from all the inscriptions on her half-finished temple.

At the present day the pillars of the temple of this dispossessed queen stand out dazzling white against the golden-brown cliff—a vivid and striking contrast of color. Two sloping ways lead the pilgrim up from one terrace level to another. Within the colonnade on the left hand corner is a fine representation of the king praying and sacrificing to the Theban deities. The gateway is approached through a long avenue of sphinxes known as the Western avenue.

For sheer magnificence of size the columns of the Temple of Hathor, at Dendera, are among the most remarkable in Egypt. An idea of the diameter of the columns can be gained by comparison with the native figure spanning one of the great cylinders.

One of the best preserved of the pylons, or temple gateways, is that of the temple of Khensu at Karnak. Under the hollow cornice is a fine representation of the king praying and sacrificing to the Theban deities. The gateway is approached through a long avenue of sphinxes known as the Western avenue.

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