The Public Buys a Ghetto
— As Chicago "Redevelops"

Faced with a growing population, a serious housing shortage, the worst, most segregated Negro slum of any major northern metropolis, and deterioration of most housing units, Chicago is a city with a serious crisis. And yet at present it seems totally unprepared to cope with it, having no plans which even take cognizance of these major facts of its existence.

At best it moves around the fringes of the question, making grandiose plans to solve peripheral problems, frequently aggravating the major ones in the process. In this category go the many plans for highway reconstruction and improved commercial downtown facilities. And, unfortunately, the federal-aided program for urban renewal and redevelopment has fallen into this classification also.

Chicago's latest experiment with urban renewal is the famous Hyde Park-Kenwood Urban Renewal Plan. This Plan has been labelled a "我が实验," a "pioneering" attempt at "interacial living," and an "exciting precedent" for urban refurbishing. In actual fact, however, it is a tragic example of the misuse of 28 million dollars of Federal funds, which at best will help only one community at the expense of the rest of the city.

Housing for the Un-Needy

At a time when the city faces a housing shortage, particularly acute for Negroes and low-income families, Hyde Park and Kenwood propose to demolish 6,000 housing units (actually considerably more if one includes the several other unrelated projects sponsored by the university in the same area), presumably reducing the total number of available units by about one-third. The housing units to be demolished are the residences of Negroes and low-income families. The units to be built are on the vacated land and will rent at $45 a month at all but $204,000.

No public housing is presently projected for the area (though considerable public housing is planned for the surrounding Negro high-density areas). Over one thousand of the families to be displaced are eligible for and desire public housing. Even the inadequate proposals originally suggested by the planners were removed at later stages of the Plan's development. A compromise 120 units has been "recommended" by the City Council after considerable public demand. This "victory" (assuming the recommendation is followed) for public housing amounts to less than 1 percent of the total housing proposed for the area, and half of it is specified as housing for the "over-60s."

None of the recently proposed units are specifically planned as subsidized middle-income housing. Vague "promises" have been made that after the Plan is approved the developers might possible arrange with the Chicago Dwelling Association or cooperatives for middle-income projects, but attempts to get guarantees have been unsuccessful.

Thus the total units available are to be reduced, without provision for public or middle-income housing, and without provision that relocation be conducted in such a way as not to cause further deterioration and concentration of minorities elsewhere in the city.

Outlined in this way surely the Plan sounds nakedly anti-social. In fact, it seems at a glance hard to understand how such a proposal could be subsidized at the taxpayer's expense. Surely this Plan must have met with the outraged protest of the more enlightened and liberal sentiment in the community and the city! Surely none can ignore the fact that when the city's crucial problem is the miserably segregated living conditions under which its 800,000 Negroes (one-fourth of the city) live, to reduce the units available to them is criminal negligence! Especially when the only other city planning in progress consists of redevelopment schemes for other areas of the city which will further reduce the units available to Negroes and low and middle-income families.

The Plan has in fact produced opposition. Opponents include the Chicago GIO which raised the demand for citywide planning prior to any redevelopment so that those displaced would not add to the problems of the rest of the city. The Chicago Urban League, in a carefully documented report noted that present urban renewal schemes will further the concentration of Negroes and the deterioration of living conditions available to them. The Chicago NAACP asked for three major changes: more public housing, middle-income housing and a sounder relocation program. The community groups neighboring on Hyde Park and Kenwood warned that as presently envisioned the Plan would create insoluble problems for them, as displaced persons moved north and south into already overcrowded Woodlawn and Oakwood. The local IVI (Illinois section of AEA) raised its voice in protest and a small community organization was formed expressly to oppose the plan. Strongest of all, the Catholic Archdiocese, represented by the outspoken Msgr. Egan, outlined the shortsightedness of this type of planning and urged its rejection or alteration to meet the needs of the entire city. Its Jim Crow character and its economic bias was demonstrated. In the City Council hearings, Msgr. chided the Plan's real estate proponents and "well known businessmen, who stand to make a good profit through the Hyde Park plan," with the following insightful comments:

You do not want public housing in Hyde Park-Kenwood. You say that kind of housing will drive investors out of the area, which you mean you will not issue the pre-requisite mortgage. You say that public housing saps initiative and weakens the moral fibre of independent action which have made this country great. Now let me ask you this. When the government sells you this land at a loss to itself, when the government issues and even buys the mortgage from you so that you make your profit without risking loss, is your initiative sapped? Are your moral fibres weakened? Indeed, the public will grow increasingly impatient with the proposition that sound business propositions require their dwelling in more. Then indeed you will have a socialism which will take more than the sep of your initiative from you.
That the University of Chicago, located in Hyde Park, the
major south side Chicago realtors, and other right-wing forces support the plan is logical. What is more surprising is that the
college of liberal and even semi-radical community which centers in this area appeared, particularly at first, solidly behind the Plan, and uniformly hostile to all criticism.

The "Liberals" Logic

The most outspoken civil liberties and civil rights leaders either came out in support of the Plan or retreated in silence. The University's religious, civic and cultural leaders all applauded enthusiastically and looked bewildered at the
touch to the NAACP, Urban League and CIO. Many of
the community leaders developed a "persecution" complex, and acted as though the opposition to the Plan was based
on some devious plot by unnamed "reactionary" forces, and
unfair hypocr ease into the "hands" of these invidious forces.
The one-mile area concerned, located near the Lake on the
southeast of Chicago, has during the past ten years and fifteen years,
become an "interrac ial" community—that is it has been "in- 
vaded" by the growing Negro ghetto which surrounds it. Up
until 1948 it met these threats with the restrictive covenant.
In 1948 this was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Since then the University of Chicago has desperately sought
other means of protecting its property and institution. For as
the ghetto expands, it expands the inadmissible conditions
of ghetto existence. These include overcrowding, doubling
and tripled up, poor upkeep of facilities by both tenants,
landlords and city officials, decreased city services, disease,
juvenile delinquency, latent hostility and community apathy.
These are the "costs of ghetto life", restricted choice of
dwelling place by Negroes, of the change of housing, of the
low-income status of Negroes Negroes of the segregated educa-
tional system existing in Chicago of the cultural deprivation
of the Negro community, and of the whole vicious cycle of conditions which aggravate and perpetuate what is so well
known to—and disliked by—all students of modern urban

The community's "liberals" are proud that with a few
years, that they were willing to remain "and fight it out". They
expect, in return, a reward.

The community's "liberals" argue that at worst this is
"economic segregation," not racial segregation. They ignore
the facts. In reality the two are inter-related since the average
income of Chicago Negroes is almost half that of its white
population. It's a "category worthy of Southern racist in
their attempts to find subtler means of maintaining school
segregation. Besides, when has it become an accepted part
of the liberal rhetoric to propose economic segregation, especially
at the taxpayer's expense?

The community's "liberals" contend that Hyde Park Ken-
wood is too crowded and have statistics to prove that there are
other communities which can take care of the overflow
(ARE YOU in favor of overcrowding?) But true as this may be,
and does not help the displaced Negro family to know that there
are less crowded lily-white communities in Chicago.

The fact that the two aldermen from Hyde Park and Ken-
wood favor open occupancy legislation does not take the
community off the hook either. For until such legislation
becomes a reality it is foolish to close one's eyes to the effect
of every decrease in housing presently available to minority
groups.

The community's "liberals" argue that too much emphasis
on public housing is a mistake, since public housing ("you
have to face it") brings "crime, crime, instability, and
other undesirable traits. But since he still favors public housing
everywhere ("although it's not the simple answer we once
thought it was"), the question must be asked: wouldn't it be
better to disperse public housing to communities of "high
standards", rather than large institutionalized blocks of low-
income, and predominantly Negro housing within the
Ghetto? For unless it is dispersed in communities of precisely
the Hyde Park type—and means the concentration of all the
problems inherent in such projects in precisely those neigh-
borhoods least able to cope with them.

The community's "liberals" look askance when one criticizes
the extraordinarily generous proposals for school expansion,
play lots, parking lots and street widening provided for
in the present Plan. Are you against school expansion, parking
space, play areas, they ask indignantly? And how hard it is
to explain that one must balance between what one "desire"
and what is feasible. The question actually is, unfortunately,
do we want school expansion in this area at the cost of further
school crowding in the Ghetto? And the question is, should
the limited school budget be used to provide benefits to this
area rather than others?

Community for Whom?

The community atmosphere created by those cooperating
with the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, the
major community spokesman for the Plan (the other major
community "backer," the South East Chicago Commission,
represents more clearly the University and other "monied"
interests) has made it difficult to examine these questions
calmly. As can be seen above, there are two ways to pose all
the arguments. Look at it from the vantage point of a middle
class resident of the area who identifies with the Uni-
versity's interests, much can be said for the Plan. But to do
so one must wear blinders as to its effects elsewhere, and or
other than the middle-upper class section of the community.

The decisive argument posed by the proponents of the Plan,
made in desperation and anger, is the clarion call of "com-
munity democracy." ("All after it's something we in the
community worked hard on, participated together in, and
reasoned worked out!"). The Plan is cited, time and again, as
model of democratic planning. "We were in" on it from
the beginning, we are told, making "our" needs, desires and
wishes known at every stage of the development. Granted,
although at least one-third of "us" (how rarely that third is
thought of as being part of the community however) didn't
exactly get what we wanted, but instead got booted out of the
community altogether. But still, democracy cannot satisfy
everyone. We must all compromise a little.

Lest we become accused of too much scolding, let us admit readily
that the Plan was remarkable in terms of the extent of par-
ticipation which did exist. But still more remarkable was the
illusion of participation. A vast network of participating
groups were created, only a small part spontaneously. This
network consisted of block groups, conference meetings,
meetings of every major community organization, detailed
discussions in the community newspaper, a long, exhaustive
Community hearing before the City-appointed Conservation Community Council at which over a hundred individuals presented suggestions, criticisms, ideas. In other words everyone had his say. Of course, all this is weighted to begin with in view of the disorganization, lack of articulation and absence of identification with the community that exists among the newly arrived, transient, low-income Negro and white resident. But just how meaningful were all these "democratic" processes? And does the word "democracy" really describe the processes in any case? Yes, if democracy means the right to be heard. No, if it means that the wishes expressed by the community have an effect upon the actual design and policy of the Plan.

Increasing the Ghetto

For despite the fact that the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, the block groups and most of the varied religious, cultural and social organizations who testified before the Conservation Community Council favored more public housing, this same Council then reduced the already inadequate proposal to zero. Despite overwhelming support for the addition of specifically designated middle-income housing, the Council made no such recommendations. Despite the fact that most of the organizations testifying urged that guarantees be written into the plan specifying that displaced persons could not be relocated into crowded Ghetto communities, the Council made no recommendations along these lines. In fact, these "democratic" procedures that it was only months afterwards during cross-examination before the City Council that it "leaked" that the Conservation Community Council had been divided on public housing and that a minority report had been presented urging the maintenance of some public housing.

In other words, the final plan presented to the Federal government and to the City Council for approval bore no sign of having been affected by these criticisms and suggestions, except for uncontroversial minuscule.

After Federal approval the Plan went into its final stage—City Council approval. A renewed sense of crisis crept over the community. The local"liberal community," speaking through the Hyde Park-Kenwood Conference urged immediate adoption without changes. The changes they insisted upon originally they now hardly referred to, suggesting that after all it was not a matter of would or could for after Council adoption (by pleading with the same agencies that hitherto had turned a deaf ear to them). Delay would be terrible, they cried. We must now accept the plan even in its unsatisfactory state or we may have no plan at all ("realpolitik").

Yet the fact is that the Conference played a strange game in which it carefully backtracked away from displacing its power to alter the Plan. For there is no doubt that without their support the Plan could not be passed, could not in fact have gotten Federal approval at all. Then why, with such power in their hands, did they have to settle for a Plan which did not meet their most vital objections? Why did they retreat from pressing their point at every opportunity? Why, when they had that opportunity so rare for the liberal and academic-minded types to determine social policy, did they capitulate? The University and the rector was desperate for some plan. They would have accepted whatever was attainable rather than have nothing at all. Far more than the individual residents, the University could not risk having nothing at all. Yet in the end the University made no compromises, and the community and its residents made all of them.

The University's dilemma is understandable. They have a large institution whose survival is at stake. With community deterioration will come parental fears, fewer student applications, and decreased faculty appeal. From their standpoint they want as "safe" a community as they can get, safe from every angle. The less it runs counter to the potential biases of potential students, parents or faculty the "safer" it is. Every unit of public housing means that much greater likelihood of a problem family, that much greater likelihood of a Negro resident, that much greater possibility that some respectable white citizen will not to move into the neighborhood, or to send his son or daughter to the University of Chicago. Every decreased housing unit available to non-whites means one less "risk." In other words, as long as they could "get away with it" the University saw no reason to champion proposals for housing that stood any chance of creating social problems, parental suspicions, financial risks.

Through a variety of means they were able to atomize the more critical forces in the community until late in the Plan's progress. They were able to create a swamp of confusion into which the very best minds in the community wandered aimlessly. They were aided by several weaknesses which intellectually, liberals and the contemporary enlightened citizen are victims of. They played upon the well-known misinformation which the liberal and social scientist is prone to—adoration for planning, neat architectural plans, handsome model communities, etc. Issue after issue of the Hyde Park Herald was filled with maps, designs and pictures of the "community of tomorrow" filled with trees, shrubs, glassy houses, wide streets and lovely plazas. They could count also upon the recently respectable tendency of self-proclaimed liberals to boast about their self-centeredness and their selfishness.

The ultimate excuse of the Plan's proponents was that, after all, if the Plan will not aid in solving the real housing problem facing Chicago, isn't it too much to expect that we, the Hyde Parkers, will bear the cost of the rest of the City. "We've done our share."

And therein lies the real tragedy. For while the city's crisis deepens, those who should be leaders in the struggle to change the pattern, have been devoting their time, energy and reputations to a plan which cannot conceivably be a pattern—a bold experiment on a pioneering project aimed at the solution to that crisis. At best it will slightly hinder the eventual solution, at worst, it will set a precedent not for the breaking down of the ghetto the increasing of our housing supply but for a rash of urban renewal projects whose effect will be the intensifying of all those problems which today beset Chicago.

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