

**Oberlander, Peter. *Land: The Central Human Settlement Issue.* Human Settlements Issues 7. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985. Pp. x, 103. Photographs, tables and bibliography. \$9.95**

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considerable shame, how many of my professional colleagues wanted to demolish the old city hall. Apparently they thought it old fashioned and therefore worthless. This book stands as a testament to an ideal in architecture — that an architect, at least, should be aware of architectural history, should see it as integral to modern professional practice, and should have the wit to be able to recognize value residing in good honest work whether or not the style involved is currently fashionable. If architects cannot do it then who can. And if we are not able to intelligently appreciate the work of our forebears, can we expect any better fate for our own?

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Oberlander, Peter. *Land: The Central Human Settlement Issue*. Human Settlements Issues 7. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985. Pp. x, 103. Photographs, tables and bibliography. \$9.95.

This book attempts to synthesize material from two CMHC/CIDA sponsored seminars at the University of British Columbia, a CMHC/CIDA sponsored paper intended to contribute to the 1983 annual meeting of the U.N. Human Settlements Commission and some of the discussion at that meeting. Its focus is on developing countries where urban populations have increased rapidly and conditions deteriorated badly since the hopeful resolutions of the 1976 Habitat Conference in Vancouver.

The central human settlements issue in developing countries, according to Oberlander, is the impact on the scarce resource — urban land — of economic development which emphasizes the industrial sector and which ignores related population distribution effects. The result has been the abolition of customary land tenure and an increasing commercialization of land, including state land, uncontrolled speculation, and a growing concentration of land in the hands of powerful private individuals and corporate interests. Problems have been aggravated by the regularization of land titles required for allocating property taxes in association with sites and services programs.

Oberlander examines the inadequacy of existing responses to the problem of urban land supply. He then reviews various policy and program initiatives which have been proposed for national governments and international co-operation agencies. Land issues, Oberlander suggests, should be approached in a social development context. Land policies should be an integral part of national development plans. Governments should concentrate on the acquisition, development and servicing of well located and affordable land. Policies related

to public control of land should be less changeable. Governments should discourage speculators from holding needed land out of use by taxing it heavily. And again, the Habitat recommendation passed after long debate and resistance, a tax should be put on the speculative profit accruing from increases in the value of land unrelated to owner improvements. House-building can be left to the informal housing sector. Governments major concern should be with security of occupancy, and this in relationship to all forms of tenure.

Oberlander is particularly enthusiastic about the merits of various forms of collective control over land by communities (eg. ownership or long-term lease). This goes a step beyond the idea of community participation in housing development supported at Habitat. Community land tenure and management, he feels, would make it easier for the nation-state to manage land, permit the implementation of Habitat's community-level recommendations, promote mobilization of self-help activities in the informal housing sector and provide opportunities for useful collaboration between communities and social agencies, NGOs and international organizations.

Oberlander's book addresses an important issue and presents some interesting material. The exposition, however, could be more systematic. The use of material on a variety of countries and cities at different stages of historical evolution, at various points of location between centre and periphery demands a conceptual framework if effective sense is to be made of it all and appropriate policies recommended. Instead we are presented in the early chapters of the book with a sort of collage of quotations, with linking comments from the author. Coherence is further undermined by an irregular alteration in tone from analytical, to pedagogical, to polemical. The reader will, nevertheless, gain from it a picture of what is and what is not being discussed about land issues at international fora on human settlements.

An idea supported by Oberlander not dealt with extensively in international discussions or the literature, though it is suggested by W.A. Doebele, is that of community land tenure. It would have been interesting, therefore, had this idea been developed a little and some examples of its implementation provided. By not elaborating upon what he means by "community" and by not addressing the problems of how the local decision-making process might work, for example, Oberlander fails to do the idea the justice it may deserve.

Community land tenure proposals cannot be pursued far without running into a problem many discussions of human settlements issues try to avoid. So does Oberlander. This is the relationship between the state, invoked to action on behalf of the urban poor, and the private interests recognized as responsible for aggravating their problems. One might well argue that it begs the question to suggest that state inaction is the result of a lack of political will. It also ignores paths of enquiry to which a growing literature on urban political

economy has led. At the heart of the failure of political will is the fact that land provides an important part of the wealth of the elites which exercise greatest influence over the state in most of the countries mentioned in Oberlander's book.

There are two other important issues which international discussions of human settlements have tended to ignore, and the book, reflecting this, ignores as well. The first is the vital relationship between local level economic development and a community's ability to sustain land, infrastructure and housing improvements. The second is the significant differential effect of urban problems and the land issue on women and the important role women play in raising human settlements issues and in finding solutions to them. Women spend more time in the home than men, being generally responsible for the domestic economy. They suffer most if the infrastructure to support this economy is absent or inadequate. They experience important discrimination in regards to land, discrimination which has been intensified by the land registration process. For women heads of households the situation can be a desperate one. Because of this women everywhere are disproportionately present among the urban poor.

Women are disproportionately present in the urban informal economy, the wide variety of economic activities never registered in national statistics, which make survival possible for so many. They are also involved in the informal housing sector. Activities in the informal economy and the women who carry them out might provide the basis for an integrated local level economic development approach to human settlements problems and the land issue. In this, the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, such an approach could represent an essential complement to the various policy and program shifts advocated by Oberlander at the end of his book.

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#### NOTES

1. For a perhaps more systematic account, see also: *Land for human settlements: Review and analysis of the present situation Report of the Executive Director United Nations Commission on Human Settlements*. HS/C/6/3. 11 January 1983. *Land for human settlements: recommendations for national and international action Report of the Executive Director United Nations Commission on Human Settlements*. HS/C/6/3Add.1. 13 January 1983.

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Murray, Sylvie et Elyse Tremblay. *Cent ans de solidarité, Histoire du CTM, 1886-1986*. Collection "Études Québécois," Montréal: VLB Editeur, 1987. Pp. 150. Illustrations, bibliography. \$14.95 paper.

It is encouraging to see a study of the Montreal Labour Council; one of the oldest in Canada. However, there remain a number of other councils, including Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver and Halifax, that similarly need to be written about. These councils have played an important role historically in the direction of the labour and working class movement, as well as the social, economic and political life of municipalities. The Conseil des travailleuses et travailleurs du Montréal (CTM) has published its story as an official centenary history.

The work, produced by a collective, purports to be an organizational history of the Conseil's struggle to contribute to improving the working and living conditions of Montrealers. It also proposes to demonstrate the relationship between these activities, union organizing, and the development of union solidarity over the past 100 years. To illustrate this, chronological tables have been included as well as lists of significant strikes, brief biographies of prominent labour leaders and photographs to underscore aspects of the history (although these are not as well integrated as they could have been). Nonetheless, in some measure, the objectives have been accomplished, while in other regards the book tends to be an apologia.

Despite the stated purpose, this is not an organizational history; indeed little is provided on the structural functioning of the Conseil until its reorganization in the 1970s. How the Conseil functioned internally — meetings, affiliations, representations, per capita dues, control, etc. — has to be assumed. This is unfortunate, as the Conseil had a structured existence that was maintained by a core of labour activists.

The accounts of the CTM's recurrent activities are perhaps the strongest aspect of the book. A number of critical issues are addressed repeatedly. These include: organizing; improved and safer working conditions; workmen's compensation; health care; better housing and living conditions; minimum wage; paid vacation; elimination of child labour; improved women workers' rights; civil liberties; better care for the unemployed, the aged and the less fortunate; and public education. That many of these recurred during this period illustrates the difficulties they had in achieving their goals. But it could also indicate that the Conseil did not have a long term plan, and were reacting on an *ad hoc* basis.

Although the title emphasizes the "solidarity" of the CTM's objectives, down-played are the frequent schisms, due in part to the Conseil's actions which negatively affected the union movement — nationally as well as locally. The ejection of the Knights of Labour was the first and most significant, since it set the stage for the CTM's orientation as a moderate, Gomperist, narrow, exclusionist, union organization. But it also provided the means of making the Canadian labour movement the handmaiden of U.S. "International" unionism. Canadian workers are still paying the