

AN APPROACH TO THE RELOCATION PROBLEM

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Much progress has been made in helping to minimize the hardships caused by re-locating persons, families, and businesses. The federal housing and transportation acts have required planning, assistance, and financial remuneration for those who are displaced. Some of the states have enacted enabling laws and far-reaching provisions for a unified, comprehensive approach to relocation. There are currently before Congress bills that would unify and standardize all federal relocation activities.

Although much has already been done, there is still much we need to know about the effects of relocation. As society becomes more organized, the magnitude of the problem grows rapidly. The number of displacements caused by public programs this year may be as many as 200,000 persons and businesses. The issue involves social problems such as the urban ghetto and racial equality. Further, the world's conscience has become more sensitive and, though no one would argue that this is bad, it does compound the problem. Laissez-faire and self-interest attitudes are increasingly being tempered by concern for the general good of society and the protection of minorities.

Our country's development has been predicated on the concept of majority rule as opposed to the dictatorship of a ruling few. We know, however, that the majority can be tyrannical in dealing with minorities, and now we see a few instances of what might be called tyranny of minorities in blocking the wishes of the majority.

As long as the nation's highway program was primarily concentrated in rural areas where right-of-way takings affected comparatively few families, there was little resistance to new roads. Rather, there was great support because of the transportation needs. In urban areas, new freeways may displace hundreds of families and businesses. Although the traffic demand is greater, the resistance is also greater. Through political, economic, and social pressure, people and communities that fear displacement and disruption by public works are effectively stopping the programs, or at least delaying them.

Each side has a valid position. Because transportation facilities, urban renewal, and public housing benefit large segments of the community, they should not be prevented because of a small but obstinate segment. However, neither should the rights and privileges of the small segment be suppressed by the will of the majority. The resolution of the problem, of course, involves compromise. We must give greater consideration to alternative solutions for transportation, housing, and other urban problems. Some of these alternatives will be economically more costly but socially less costly and disruptive. For those to be displaced, there is in addition to the costs the fear and reluctance to change. Government must not only determine fair compensation for taking property, it must also provide displaced persons with services to minimize the difficulties of relocation and with housing and business opportunities equivalent to or better than those being taken. Some experimental projects give indications that this approach may reconcile both the total community's and the individual's interests.

We have made substantial studies in relocation, but if we are to achieve the breakthrough that I have described, we must have a better understanding of the social and economic problems of relocation. A malady, which many professional people have, is to look at the world from their personal perspective and judge other men's needs and behavior according to their own professional standards. Displacement and relocation affect other people's lives. If we as planners and administrators are to achieve our programs, we must be empathetic with those who are affected. We must not only collect data and measure behavior, we must also identify with the displaced and say, "there but for the grace of God go I," and if I were they, how would I react?