

Cities on the Danger List

SICK CITIES, by Mitchell Gordon. The Macmillan Company, New York. 1963. \$6.50

WHEN one considers the state of affairs in our cities—congestion, decay, smog, crime, blight, fiscal crises—the term “sick cities” is a very apt one. The author of this book, however, is not like a doctor, diagnosing and prescribing. Instead he reports the various rashes and dislocations afflicting today's urban areas, and speaks of their “patch-quilt” growth. Unfortunately, this book is something of a patch-quilt itself, piecing together a great amount of information about a great number of cities.

Nevertheless, it is a good reportorial job, and along with the horrible side, Mr. Gordon presents some constructive solutions being attempted by various cities. But these measures, too, seem rather miscellaneous and do not hang together according to any recognizable principle. They range from attempts to purify the air, to efforts at getting borrowed books back to the public library, and from parking problems to city annexations.

The author might have found, but

did not, a common denominator by looking more closely at the land on which cities are built. The high price of land, the monopoly of land, the effects of land speculation, the under-taxation of land—closer attention to these matters would have shed much more light on the diagnosis of our sick cities.

Here and there in the book, some pertinent cases are related, but without being given the emphasis they deserve. The author acknowledges that, with all the crowding, there is still plenty of space, but that it is becoming “less and less accessible,” and more and more high-priced, but he lets this fact slip by. He also sees that, despite complaints and crises of municipalities, they have not made as much of the property tax as they should, but he makes no distinction between land and buildings.

Mr. Gordon also observes that cities, instead of turning to Washington for relief, should learn that the resources for solving their problems must be found within the municipalities themselves. This is a good note, and if cities do so, it might lead them to fundamental solutions.

—R. C.



Erie is the first Pennsylvania city to give serious study to the merits of land value taxation. The City Council, acting through its Fiscal Committee, has appointed a special study committee of 15 to investigate the advantages of L.V.T. The Erie Land Tax Association, which has strongly urged this action, is confident that if a thorough and complete study is made it will be found that land value taxation will encourage the building of larger and better homes, stores and factories, and the improvement of old ones. Also it will make landsites available at lower cost and encourage investment in properties, making the ugly and decaying portion of the city attractive, and providing incentive for well-built homes, stores and shops for rental at attractive rates.

All who want to know more about land value taxation are invited to ELTA headquarters, 2217 Peninsula Drive, any Thursday evening during the summer for open house discussion periods.