

New York's Troubles— and Some Remedies

LET New York City go bankrupt and make it impossible for it in future to borrow any money and force it to live within its means is Milton Friedman's recipe for New York City's present phenomenal cash deficit.

John Kenneth Galbraith, who was also consulted, (*New York Times*, July 30) took the opposite view: "... no problem associated with New York City could not be solved by providing more money." He was outraged that wealthy people could escape their fair share of taxation by moving to the suburbs which he described as "fiscal funkholes". He did not suggest concentrating taxes on land values, although as an economist he must know, as a fellow American economist once put it, that "Land is the only thing that cannot get up and walk away when taxed."

Robert C. Wood, president of the University of Massachusetts, also argued for an infusion of money to save New York City.

But he also said: "We have to seriously go back to Henry George If in urban renewal, we had leased land instead of selling it to private developers, most of the cities, including New York, would be better off."

Another contributor to the discussion, Jane Jacobs, author of *The Economy of Cities* said New York City should "take the lid off transportation." Any safe driver should be allowed to run any kind of transportation he wanted to, at any time and to any place.

The inclusion of balanced budgets, free trade in transportation and the ideas of Henry George in a pooling of ideas by eighteen urban experts gives hope that all is not lost on the economic front.

COMMENTING on New York City's financial crisis, Philip Finkelstein, Director of the Centre for Local Tax Research, says (*New York Times*, August 17) that it is time to tell the truth about the city's most fundamental source of revenue - and its only measure of

debt capacity - its real property tax base.

For a long time it appears that the city depended upon the construction boom in Manhattan to finance its budget. As constructions went up so did the local tax bill, and the City was soaking the owners of new office blocks and all owners who improved their properties. Now, says Philip Finkelstein, the well has run dry and the load has been shifted to existing properties.

The fact is that the city has

never been properly assessed, says Mr. Finkelstein. Market values for assessment come into play only when a new building is constructed, a new owner takes over or there is a major renovation.

"The scandalous administration of assessments has led to the milking of poor properties by owners and the milking of good ones by the public treasury. Vacant, underutilized, never-improved parcels enjoy the benefits of assessments bearing no relation to market value. Top-quality improvements carry the load. As long as there were enough of the latter, the former could be blithely dismissed. Where values in the past rose only in Manhattan, and the rest of the city crept along, the opposite now seems to be the case."

Doomwatch in the South-East

P. CLAVELL BLOUNT

(Chairman, Anti-fluoridation Campaign)

ACCORDING to the Department of Health circular number R. 487, the purpose of the computer records now being built up is "the mental and moral improvement of coming generations" and this implies a culling, by one means or another, of the "human herd". What exactly is meant by the words just quoted? Who decides who is to be culled out? Who decides which of us is fit to remain and/or to procreate? Who determines acceptable standards?

The use of computers to store health records is an innovation the implications of which are almost certainly not appreciated by the vast majority of doctors—which applies equally to the practice of using public water supplies for conveying into people's bodies substances which have been added at the water works for the purpose of influencing the development or functioning of the human body, nervous system and mind.

Whatever assurances may be given by officials in central or local government, there can be no effective protection of confidential medical data once it gets on to a computer tape. Any expert can crack any code system set up to

deter misuse. "Leaks" of so-called confidential information are proverbial today.

Dr. D. Wild, M.B., Area Medical Officer, West Sussex Area Health Authority, who has done his best to proof the computers in West Sussex against abuse, admits that an expert could crack his system, says Dr. Edward C. Hamlyn, M.B., Ch.B., Medical Adviser to the House of Commons All-Party Committee on Freedom of Information. When the system spreads beyond Dr. Wild's control—as it undoubtedly will, sooner or later—abuse will be inevitable.

Dr. Hamlyn alleges that when he took the matter up with Dr. Wild, the latter shrugged-off the danger saying that "we shall soon be a totalitarian state—what does it matter?"

Dr. David Owen, M.P., Minister of State (Health), admits that the computer in West Sussex is not even housed on Health Authority premises. He admits that anyone who gained access to the key number of an individual, could obtain confidential information about that individual from the medical records on a visual display unit,