

Working Toward Redistributive Justice

Paul Davidoff

The essence of politics is who gets what. Or call it distributive justice. The public planning process as a part of the political system is inextricably related to the distributional question facing communities in which planners work.

From one point of view there is only one basic criterion for judging the worth of public policy proposals: redistribution. Does the proposed action tend to reduce the differences between those who have much and those who have little? That question overrides every other consideration. In matters of international relations the same standard applies: will the proposed action tend toward reducing the gap between the rich and the poor of the world?

Those of us who accept that standard for judging the justice or propriety of proposed action need not, I believe, answer the question of whether our position is a call for equality. The gaps between the haves and the have nots are so large that it is enough to work toward their reduction—to work toward greater equity between citizens of communities (be they local, national, or international).

For those of us who accept the standard of redistribution, those plans, policies, and programs which tend to further present distributional standards are unacceptable. Thus, the many plans which have aimed at enlarging the wealth, health, industrial growth, and so forth of a society while maintaining the status quo in regard to the distribution of those values have been judged improper or unjust.

A large proportion of planning, community development, and urban renewal must be judged inadequate in terms of the redistributive standards. Many of the conflicts in the planning profession, particularly during the sixties, were about redistribution versus overall growth or further enrichment of the affluent.

Looking back at the fight over whether the planning profession should incorporate social issues within its purview, it can be seen that the substance of the dispute clouded the more fundamental question of whether planners were to think in distributional terms in considering costs and benefits of proposals. It was the civil rights consciousness of that period that most directly manifested a clear distributional perspective. An important outcome of this analysis was the adoption by the American Institute of Planners (AIP) of Section 1.1 (b) of its Code of Professional Responsibility. That standard called for professional planners to be explicitly redistributive in all of their work. That section of the AIP Code is only aspirational. It certainly does not describe the behavior of most professional work, though it is a striking reminder of the high social goal contemplated by the profession just a few years ago. The code provision states:

1.1 Canons

- (b) A planner shall seek to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of disadvantaged groups and persons, and shall urge the alteration of policies, institutions and decisions which militate against such objectives.

To my knowledge there is only one city planning agency in the nation practicing planning in accord with AIP's standard, and that is Cleveland's. Insofar as the new policies plan for Cleveland truly represents the practices of the Planning Commission, then the agency is consciously pursuing a redistributive approach. The Cleveland Plan is overwhelming. It is short, concise,

Paul Davidoff, AIP, is Executive Director of Suburban Action, Inc., and a former member of the Board of Governors of AIP.

and powerful. Its technical materials are relevant to the conditions of the city. It sets one overriding standard for judging and appraising policies and programs:

Equity requires that locally responsible government give priority attention to the goal of promoting a wider range of choices for Cleveland residents who have few, if any choices.

In terms of gripping the basic issues confronting urban communities, the Cleveland Plan does for intelligence and judgment what the Burnham Plan did for aesthetics. (*The City Just, the City Fair, The City Equitable* are possible titles for the movement the Cleveland Plan has started). This plan is the model that will guide all planning that aims to deal effectively with the root causes of urban problems.

Norman Krumholz is to be congratulated for having the skill, power, and sensitivity to direct the development of this plan. Ernie Bonner and other staff and Commission members should also receive the profound appreciation of the profession. They have brought urban planning out of its placid indifference to gross inequality. They have made distributional analysis the key to successful understanding of both the underlying facts of the city and its region and of policy recommendations. With great daring they have transformed planning in Cleveland from a holding operation, as it is in other cities, to a practical means for developing short- and long-range solutions to the causes of decay.

The Cleveland Plan is not perfect. Inequality in Cleveland, as elsewhere in the United States, is both economic and racial, yet the plan is surprisingly silent on the subject of race. The authors may have believed that they could gain wider public support by establishing a concept that could win adherents from many groups. Explicit recognition of racial problems, and the creation of standards for measuring the city's movement toward closing the gap between the whites and the nonwhites may have been judged counterproductive.

The lesson of the past in planning, however, has been that important social issues such as race and class cannot be sidestepped. Although it is difficult to gain support for a direct approach, nevertheless, without such

directness, no significant reduction in class or race inequalities will occur. Despite this generality, I think it would be useful for Krumholz to tell the *Journal* audience why he decided not to make more explicit the standards for reducing the differences between whites and nonwhites in Cleveland.

No plan for reducing inequality and expanding opportunities for those who have least is sufficient without consideration of the issue of women in society. The Cleveland Plan should be amended to include more specific guidelines to policies working to expand the rights and opportunities of women.

The Master Plan and the Comprehensive Plan have come under sharp criticism in recent years. Pragmatics have dictated shorter run, less total approaches to planning. Krumholz and his associates have restored the concept of a central concerting document that incorporates a bold and forthright vision, giving guidance to all actions subsumed under it.

It is in this subsuming of objectives and policies in particular areas under the single general goal that the plan becomes a dynamic and effective instrument. The Report establishes four broad policy areas for effecting its goal; they are: income, housing, transportation, and community development. In each of these areas objectives and policies are set forth which will guide future action and conduce toward achievement of the overall goal.

It might be politically difficult to set time goals for the achievement of the plan's objectives and policies. However, if certain goals were established for the accomplishment of specific objectives regarding conditions of income, housing, transportation, and community standards, it would provide an invaluable frame against which to measure progress.

In the year of HABITAT, when the most honest illustration of United States housing policies are those documents that show Nixon-Ford moratoria on housing expenditures and vetos of significant social housing legislation, it is remarkable that the City of Cleveland has fashioned such a meaningful report. In a time of despair it is a beacon of hope.