

FOREWORD

Canberra, among the cities of the world, is in many ways unique. The story of its beginnings is told in this book. Most cities have their origins in the needs of trade, defence or communication. Canberra is an offspring of politics and a social ideal. The politics were those of Federation, nation making and the slow conquest of a hostile continent. The idea was one of social and economic freedom. This was to be a city unmarred and undistorted by exploitation of man by man. It would be a city like Ebenezer Howard's *garden* cities where all land would be publically owned and used for the public good. It would be a city of beauty, without slums and ugliness and not a breeding ground for vice and crime. In large measure this ideal has been achieved — so far. But Canberra today is still a young city.

Of course Canberra has had enormous advantages. It has been planned from its beginning and it has been planned in the post-automobile age. It is not an industrial city and has not the terrible problems of air pollution, industrial wastes and environmental degradation. It has no racial problem to poison and embitter its social and political life. At this present state of its development — and it is still very much a village compared with its total potential — its chief drawback is its immaturity and newness. There is about it an air of artificiality. There is the sameness of the rather mediocre domestic architecture and the self-conscious splendour of its public buildings. One finds its inadequate, *make do*, homely Parliament House rather a relief. Everywhere is the ordered, measured efficiency of the public service. The atmosphere is one of job security with superannuation to housing adequacy, sans paupers, sans criminals, sans unemployed, sans vitality and sans colour. But these are merely the disadvantages of youth. Canberra will be a splendid city, a model for the world, an example to mankind.

Rightly this book presents Canberra in the setting of Australian history and the story begins at the beginning. Canberra can only be explained and understood in the light of history and its lessons must be grasped more especially by those who guide the destiny and plan the future of the Australian Capital Territory.

There is an enormous social crisis centred on the modern city. World population is expanding rapidly and nearly all the millions added each year to the total must live in urban areas. There is a crisis in housing and public transport. There is air pollution, noise, ugliness and squalor. Slums spread faster than urban renewal can eliminate them. Desperate efforts at rehousing produce concentrations of high-rise *hives*, like the tenements of Hong Kong, where sub-human living is inevitable.

The situation is aggravated by three dangerous delusions. The first is that the developer, whose prime motive is profit and not the good of city or citizen, has any but a subsidiary part to play in the building of a city. This delusion has frustrated or destroyed many splendid and imaginative efforts at revitalising American cities. It is a delusion from which Canberra until

recently has been almost immune. The second harmful delusion is that houses, buildings and other improvements are proper subjects for local taxation. Australia has demonstrated to the world the very great advantages cities enjoy when local taxes are concentrated on land values and improvements are tax exempt.

In the United States of America where local taxes are so heavy — they support police and education as well as the usual municipal services — taxation on improvements, in effect, subsidises slums and penalises development so as to be a major obstacle to urban growth and renewal.

The third and strongest delusion of all which perpetuates the urban problem is that any great modern city can be built and its development controlled for the public good without the land of the city being publically owned. A dynamic city must respond to changing needs, to new transport patterns, to population growth and obsolescence. It cannot do this under a freehold system because it is caught in the strait jacket of land costs. It must pay to even breathe, let alone move! This freehold delusion dies hard but dying it is. Nowhere have greater efforts been made to meet the urban challenge of our times than in England. There the thirty New Towns — providing for a million inhabitants — have been made possible only by the public acquisition of the land and the establishment of a leasehold system of land tenure.

Herein lies Canberra's importance. It is a type and model of the city of the future — the city the modern world so desperately needs. The leasehold system of land tenure is the centre and the heart of it and this system is today in danger of being weakened or even permanently destroyed. Mr. Brennan's book is extremely relevant to a crisis situation with fortuitously has matured even as he wrote.

Rolland O'Regan

Wellington,
New Zealand.