

Tight Grip of Land Monopoly

A REMARKABLE concentration of ownership of building land in Toronto is reported in the *Globe and Mail*, Toronto August 17. The facts come from "the Government-suppressed Dennis report on housing" which says that the six leading developers in ten of Canada's largest cities own at least half and in most cases nearly all the residential land that will be needed, by official estimates, for development in this decade in each city.

"The concentration of land holding in a small number of very powerful holders is a new phenomenon," says the report, "and in terms of increasing land prices it has been important in the last five years and does pose the real threat of even greater rates of increase in the future."

The Dennis study group was established in early 1971 through the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and it claims that a large measure of responsibility for the failure to arrest the rapid increase in land prices must be placed on the federal Government.

The Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation branches in major cities were asked to estimate the local residential land requirements and the residential acreage held by the six leading developers in each area.

In the Toronto area, 19,600 acres were required and of these 18,000 acres were owned by the six biggest developers. The following table printed in the *Globe and Mail* shows estimates of acreage requirements on the left and acreage held by the six leading developers on the right.

Calgary	7,500	7,500
Edmonton	8,790	8,500
Halifax	2,250	1,600
London	4,252	3,820
Ottawa-Hull	8,128	7,000
Regina	1,250	1,250

Vancouver	8,000	6,900
Windsor	3,000	1,500
Winnipeg	8,000	6,155

But this is not all. The report claims that developer-owned land holdings are undoubtedly underestimated as they cover only land of which the corporation branches had knowledge and did not include land held in trust for the developer or in other corporate names.

Other points made in the report were:

*In the Toronto area three firms own in excess of 5,000 acres each, on the western fringes of the city.

*Major land holders in the Toronto area are George Wimpey Canada Ltd., Monarch Construction Ltd. and Richard Costain (Canada) Ltd. - all are wholly owned subsidiaries of giant English building companies.

*Land prices have quadrupled in the last twenty years and are likely to double in the next ten. "There should be a tax system to discourage the concentration of holdings."

Not a Good Example

LAND SPECULATION on the part of Attorney-General Dalton Bales in Toronto has created a stir in Ontario Government circles and in the Press. The *Globe and Mail*, Toronto August 4, reports that Mr. Bales and two partners paid \$252,000 for land in Markham Township as a long-term investment while the Ontario Cabinet was privately preparing a plan to limit Metro's population by promoting growth to the east.

Mr. Bales estimates he and his two partners could make between \$77,000 and \$177,000, but denies suggestions of impropriety because he had no prior knowledge of the Government's intentions.

One of his partners said he bought the land because of future

development potential - "Since the railway cuts through the property it would be ideal for a commercial site or shopping centre."

The history of this one hundred odd acres of farm land is that it successively changed hands over five years realising \$78,750 in December 1967, \$180,000 in August 1968 and \$252,000 in September 1969. The latest offer made for the land is \$600,000. Mr. Bales and partners have refused the offer and want to "hold it indefinitely." (It may be compulsorily purchased.)

Questions of jiggery-pokery apart, who can blame Mr. Bales and his associates for using their opportunities? But the fact that trafficking in God's earth is legally approved and supported is another matter.

. . . And of Course Land Prices . . .

THIS PLACE, (Lerwick,) is simply amazing. Here these people are just sitting on the edge of the richest oil boom in British history, and right now there's nothing to eat.

Lipton's the only chain store in town, has bare, bare shelves.

There's nothing in the little cafe across the road except Kit Kat bars.

And yet the place is bursting with these rich burly oil-rig men and foreign trawler guys, with all their saved wages, roaming around town.

These blokes - Dutch, Americans, Scots, Norwegians - from the oil rigs are the new carpet-baggers. Some of them earn well over a hundred quid a week.

And this is supposed to be the new Texas. Local people point out over the bay to show you where the pipeline is going to come in. I'm told that there's going to be 700 new jobs within a period of two years in the Shetlands - a big boom for a community of 17,000.

Land prices are rocketing. But you can't eat land.

Mary Kenny in the *Evening Standard*, August 10.