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## Editorial Comment

### *The Persistence of the Speculative Spirit*

Civilize ourselves as we may, it is difficult to overcome the primitive gambling instinct. To this, more than to any other one cause, is due the opposition of most landowners to any effective legislation for limiting building heights or restricting building areas. The purchaser of land in a growing city hopes that some day his property may be selected as the site of a 50-story skyscraper. He, therefore, opposes any ordinance which would make the erection of such a structure impossible. In so doing he forgets, however, that no city can be made up wholly or chiefly of tall buildings, and that sky-scraper land values on a few favored thoroughfares mean an unfair depression of values on many other streets.

The altitude attained by land prices in New York City is a subject of frequent comment; but the contrasts in values found even in the lower end of Manhattan Island are not so generally known. In an address before the National Conference on City Planning, in Chicago last month, some illuminating figures were quoted by Lawson Purdy, President of the Department of Taxes and Assessments of New York City. Most striking, perhaps, was the fact that a certain lot measuring 25 by 100 feet had been sold at \$1,250,000, with lots of equal size not more than 1,000 feet distant offered for sale at \$25,000. Proper building regulations would have made the \$1,250,000 price impossible; but would they not also have increased the value of all of the \$25,000 lots? From the point of view of enlightened sel-

fishness, the great majority of landowners in any city might well favor such a restriction of building heights and areas as is suggested in the following resolution introduced by Mr. Purdy at the Chicago meeting and referred by the Conference to its Executive Committee:

*Whereas*, The rights of landowners are frequently infringed, and the value of land and buildings impaired by the erection of buildings of excessive height or otherwise unsuitable; and

*Whereas*, The erection of such buildings is often forced upon landowners by the absence of such regulations as will adequately conserve their right to proper light, air and access; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That regulations governing the construction of buildings should be framed upon the principle that no man should so use his land as to injure his neighbor; that, subject to the limitations imposed by existing conditions due to previous lack of regulation, the construction of buildings should be so regulated in respect to their height and area that any section of the city might be completely covered with buildings of the maximum height and area permitted in such section without impairing the enjoyment of such light, air and access by all of them as may be necessary for the most profitable use of the entire section.

It is recognized that the regulation of building heights in New York City is a problem of peculiar complexity; and the report of the commission recently appointed by the city to investigate the entire problem will, therefore, be awaited with much interest. That some few American cities have already restricted building heights may be taken as indicating a determination not to emulate New York's needless congestion; and it is to be hoped that the thorough study of the question now under way in the

metropolis may result in action beneficial in its effect and widespread in its influence.

It should be borne in mind that intelligent building codes do not necessarily involve a monotonous sky line. The tower building may be made possible by making restrictions of height dependent on the width of the street and the percentage of the lot occupied. Not high structures *per se*, but inadequate aid and access, the needless use of artificial light, and congestion of transportation and traffic are the evils which such regulation should eliminate or minimize.

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### *The Fundamental Right to Leisure*

Not only to promote wholesome use of leisure, but to help secure leisure—for child-laborers, working-women and all overburdened toilers—is an appropriate function of the recreation movement. So said Mary E. McDowell, of the University of Chicago Settlement, at the playground congress held in Richmond, Va., last month by the Playground and Recreation Association of America.

In speaking for the right to leisure, Miss McDowell placed emphasis on a fundamental frequently overlooked in present-day efforts to encourage the right use of play-time; for too often those whom we would teach to play properly have no time or ambition to play at all. Though a summer vacation and a Saturday half-holiday are the privilege of most salaried employees, a rest of even one day in seven has not yet been won by many thousands of manual workers; and even where hours of work have been shortened, the gain to the worker is often more apparent than real. To quote Miss McDowell:

"To the overworked factory hand there is little comfort in the historic fact that the hours of work to-day are less than they were fifty or a hundred years ago, for the workers know that the overstrain and the speeding up have been increased from year to year.

"Until the states realize that the workers are determined upon a shorter work-day as a protection against the increased speed of the machines, we shall have strikes and discontent from the organizations that demand this right. A girl running a machine that makes 4,400 stitches a minute, whose eyes must watch the lightning speed of these many needles, must be protected. A young girl of eighteen, at the close of a week of ten hours' work each day at an uncongenial occupation, is desperate

when Saturday night comes, and protests in the reckless manner of youth when she answers her older friend, 'When Saturday night comes I'm so tired I don't care a damn where I go.' Another explained, 'I was so tired I just went along with him.' It is recklessness and weariness that are as dangerous to the morals of young women as are small wages."

It was also shown by Miss McDowell how deadening is the effect on the normal play spirit, natural to all young creatures, of mechanical work done by boys and girls under 16 years of age.

"The spirit of play that keeps human beings young is very early atrophied in the specialized labor of this day. The young working people of my acquaintance who left school between 14 to 16 years of age do not know how to play. The spontaneous nature of youth expresses itself in animal play, but the spirit seems to be benumbed. They dance—yes, but without rhythm; they laugh—but without the ring of joy and youthful music. Even the clubs of young Americans who work in offices or telephone exchanges, who know only the office life, are totally lacking in power of initiative; they are passive in their amusements. Dancing or sitting before the moving pictures seems their only recreative resource.

"We who believe in the divinity of the play spirit will have to secure more leisure for all who labor, and protect the adolescent boys and girls in the unnatural place they now have in the industrial world. Eliminate those under 16 years from the factory, give a short work-day to all, and develop the power of initiative and resource, then we may be able to keep alive the power of play as a spiritual gift."

But adequate leisure and the physical and mental ability to enjoy it are not self-sufficient. Community efforts must also be directed towards the providing of proper places and trained supervision for public recreation. "Children," quoted Joseph Lee at the Richmond congress, "inherit the play spirit, but they don't inherit specific games any more than they inherit the Lord's Prayer." There must be teaching, leadership and encouragement for game-playing. These the outdoor playground, the recreation house and the public school social center are supplying in increasing measure in many American cities and towns. The whole movement is one of the most hopeful of present-day tendencies in community betterment; and to the members and supporters of the Playground and Recreation Association of America belongs no small share of the credit for its inspiration and practical guidance.