

## IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PLANNING IN THE SOUTH FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

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The titles of the topics in this symposium imply *governmental* planning and/or control, and this paper will proceed on that assumption. As a matter of fact, commercial-industrial planning by individuals and business houses is the rule and some of it has looked far into the future. This kind of planning is usually applied economic geography, as for instance the location of Gary, or the highly integrated United Fruit Company or the establishment of rubber plantations in the oriental tropics. The power of huge private business planning organizations is often so great that they are frowned upon, as under the anti-trust law. A significant factor in the success of such planning is the definiteness of the goal, or ends to be achieved.

Economic and social planning implies the wish for changes that would not be expected in the normal course of events. The change may be either to a more desirable situation or from an undesirable one. Public planning is likely to mean regulation of activities to improve conditions considered intolerable, without much thought of a distant ideal. Reasons for this negative approach are: the difficulty of agreement on social goals, a feeling on the part of legislators that they are responsible to electorates immediately rather than in the long run, and the influence of routine.

Reduction of work to routine is necessary for efficiency in farming, manufacturing and other activities. Establishment of these routines is most difficult for farmers, who then are naturally loath to scrap them or to change them radically. Furthermore a decided change in one routine may disrupt other routines geared to it. Witness the apprehension with which many persons have viewed the reported perfection of a mechanical cotton picker.

Planning for the South has been stimulated by recent attention to its problems, of which the core seems to be insufficient income to buy goods and services like the rest of the nation. This is particularly true of the southeast. Income variability caused by vagaries of weather and insect damage complicates the problem in the southwest. The immediate objective is relief, and the goal which has been visualized is increased consumption. Participation of the rest of the country and the use of Federal funds has been justified on the basis of effects on the rest of the country, a business proposition in other words, rather than an out and out humanitarian enterprise.

The causes of this low level of income are many and complex, but there is more or less general agreement that the most serious are: dependence upon cotton farming, occupation of submarginal land (some originally poor, some worn out), Negroes in large numbers, and unsatisfactory tenure with its attendant evils. Tenancy means that the land contributes to the incomes of both owner and operator, and if the land is poor or the units small neither one receives much.

The Negro problem is a delicate one, but it must be recognized eventually that the level of incomes cannot be raised far as long as policy-making whites are unwilling to see a considerable fraction of the population rise to anything approaching economic equality.

A glance at a type-of-farming map will show that the Cotton Belt includes most of the South, and that few counties within the Cotton Belt have other than a cotton economy. Cotton farming conduces to low incomes because: it is a one-crop system, using only a small part of the farmers' labor time; the farms are small; it is particularly suited to tenancy and tenancy to it; farming practices associated with it promote soil deterioration. However, despite the evils that go with it, cotton will remain the basis of the southern economy as long as foreign markets will take our surplus. The region has definite advantages in world competition in cotton, but it does not have the same comparative advantage in the production of alternate crops. The South produces corn at nearly twice the cost in the Corn Belt, wheat at 50% over the cost in the hard winter wheat region, oats at 50% over the cost in the Corn Belt.

The warm humid south has sharply contrasting soil types—some very rich, some unproductive. The rich areas are the bottom lands and the black prairie lands on limey clays or soft limestones. The poor lands are most often belts of sandy formations in the coastal plain sediments, more or less parallel to the coast. Humid warmth and loose soil texture are especially conducive to soil leaching. Other poor lands are in the mountains and the eroded uplands. Even the black prairies now contain much eroded submarginal or abandoned land.

Increased income (other than relief or subsidy) may come from new land, land improvement, new crops, crop improvement (especially cotton), new markets, better farm management, better health and energy, or a shift to a non-agricultural economy.

New lands are available in the Mississippi bottoms and elsewhere by draining and/or clearing, and in the semi-arid southwest by irrigation and/or clearing. This is expensive and requires cooperative action. However, many of the lighter soils of the South are responsive to improvement and material increases in income are possible in this direction. New crops such as tung oil will add to incomes but none is in sight to replace cotton as the basis of a new economy. Crop improvement offers more hope. The invasion of the boll weevil undid decades of work in cotton breeding, necessitating a new start. We can expect continual progress.

Better farm management holds possibilities. Farm gardens and livestock may do much to combat malnutrition and low efficiency. It might affect the point of view, with even more significant effects. Reduction of malaria and hookworm infection is bound to have beneficent results.

Manufacturing has been hailed by some as the emancipator from the cotton economy, as new factories are built throughout the South, but serious students recognize that the industrialization of the region is rapid in its percentage increase because it has a small base. Its absolute increase has been nowhere near as rapid. Furthermore its new industries have been generally those that use little labor or the cheapest of labor. Manufacturing in general finds restricted local markets a serious obstacle, and those industries that came to use cheap labor have not contributed as much to Southern purchasing power as some may have hoped. We shall have more industries but not to equal the established manufacturing district for a long time at least. Planning implies either the permanence of the basic economy or a known change or evolution in it. For the immediate future I believe we can contemplate the continuance of the cotton economy.

It is to be expected that governmental planning in the South will emphasize social goals and economic problems directly pertinent to them and that it will move toward even more distant yet more distinctly visualized ends. In the present situation it would seem logical to emphasize the

consumption of services, since they affect productivity and the enjoyment of life so vitally. The contributions of medicine, hygiene, sanitation, education, and some forms of personal service may be more desirable than the possession of certain goods often taken as criteria of standards of living. The provision of these services might well occupy some of the southern people who migrate for lack of economic opportunity in the South. Certainly it is desirable that selective migration *leave* people capable of such occupations rather than *remove* them from the South.