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Regional Planning

I have only been back a few hours from a holiday a thousand miles away from here, down in the State of Georgia where I too, have been doing some planning, as to how to turn the corn field into cattle pastures and corn fields into forests and as a result have been planning in the rural sense. And I have come here tonight without any prepared address, but with a thought that I would not make a speech but just talk to you offhand about some of the elements that have developed in regard to planning since the days nearly twenty years ago when Mr. Norton and my uncle, Mr. Delano, first talked to me about regional planning for the City of Chicago. And I think from that very moment that I have been interested not in the planning of any one mere city but in planning in its larger aspects.

Out of that original survey initiated by Mr. Norton in Chicago has developed a new understanding of the problems that affect not merely bricks and mortar, and subways, and streets, but planning that affects also the economic and the social life of a community and then of a county, and then of a State, and perhaps the day is not far distant when planning will become a part of the national policy of this community.

It is very remarkable how this germ of thought has taken hold all over the United States, how the Chicago planners, and afterwards this regional plan for the Metropolitan area in and around the City of New York, spread all over the country, how almost every city that counts itself a progressive city is thinking in terms of the future and of what has spread even down to the smaller communities now as villages and spread upwards as we know we will in the neighboring county of Westchester, to include planning for entire counties and how in exactly the same way the thought of the future has taken hold of us who are charged with the duty of conducting the affairs of a State government.

None of us can tell how far this great picture of the Metropolitan development during the next generation will be carried out in so far as detail is concerned, but we do know, I think, that the work of this Regional Planning Committee affecting as it does, not just the people, 7,000,000 of them who live in the corporate entity known as the City of New York, but also those who live in our neighboring cities of New Jersey and of Connecticut, in the unincorporated areas in three states, within a radius of fifty miles, we know that this planning for this vast population which after all is very nearly one-tenth of the entire population of the United States is going to be a foundation stone, one which mayors and governors, and supervisors are going to check back on two generations, and three generations from now.

I wish that this regional planning committee had started its work not in 1922; that was over a generation too late so far as I am concerned. I might say it was over a century too late. If this regional plan had been started in 1817 it might have prevented my great grandfather from selling his farm in Harlem and moving up to Dutchess County. If he had held onto that nice little old farm which he let go of in 1817 because of the young people of that day getting into their buggies in what was then New York City some seven miles away in the evening, especially on moonlight nights who were in the habit of coming out to his country place and parking inside of his gates!

Now, human nature is human nature even in 1817, and the old gentleman was so distressed by these young people coming inside his gates that he sold a perfectly good farm of 125 acres, a farm that is now bounded by Fifth avenue on one side and the East river on the other, and ran from 110th street to 125th street. Well, of course, if he had held onto his farm and hadn't moved to Dutchess county, probably now the family would have been so rich we would have died out and I wouldn't be here tonight!

It is high time for the city and high time for this country to take up the thought of the future. Let me expand for a moment on that thought of Dwight Morrow's, the cost of not planning. You and I in middle life remember well, and we still see the example of countless buildings which when we were young were considered the last word, not only in architecture, but in usefulness in this city. They have gone, torn down to make room for a building three times as high. You and I can remember literally the days when the goats were basking in the pastures of Harlem, and yet, in those days when the opportunity was there to plan for this year of 1931 nobody gave a thought to it, and New York grew up like Topsy, and that is not only true of this city, it is true of the neighboring cities, it is true of Long Island, it was true of Westchester, it is true of a great part of the nearer parts of New Jersey and Connecticut up to this time. There has been no thought for the prevention of waste. The investment of good, hard dollars into structures, into public improvements in the private investments of all kinds with the expectation on the part of people who put up the good dollars, whether they were private investors or mere taxpayers, that the particular structure that their money was going into would last through the ages, and today it is torn down.

Think of the waste of it; think of the unhappiness of it; think of the lives in the city which today are being lived under distressful conditions, which would have been vastly better off if our grandparents had thought about the future.

Now, if that is true, and I am going to wander a little afield, if that is true of a city, how much truer is it of the larger community? Three years ago I went to Albany just to cite one of many examples. I found that the State of New York had many wards, that it had many patients in its hospitals, and that at that particular moment, we had a shortage of 12,000 beds in our hospitals. When I say a shortage, I don't mean that we turned these patients away, I mean that in hospitals then in existence the beds had been crowded into the corridors, side by side with other beds, so that the conditions in those hospitals were a disgrace to this State, and it was only then that we began to plan for the future, and as a result of that planning, within another three years we will have working out a five year plan, a sound five year plan in this instance, under which every patient of the State of New York will be adequately and properly housed according to the best modern practices at a cost of a bond issue, as you know, but when that time comes, and we have caught up with the needs from that time on, we will be able to pay as you go every year to take care of the increased number of patients that occurs by a normal increase in population.

Yes, regional planning has hit Albany at last. And after all, it isn't a mere question of sociology, of welfare in the sense of taking care of the dependent and the sick; it is also a question very largely of economics, and when we get into that field, we open up a vista the magnitude of which you and I can scarcely appreciate. Let me give you an illustration. Two or three years ago down in Georgia I happened to be passing a station on one of the through railroads, and through that station there came a long milk train, a train made up of tank cars and milk cars laden with milk and cream fourteen or fifteen cars to the train, and on the main trunk of passenger schedule, and I said to the station master, "Where is that train coming from, up in Northern Georgia?"

He said, "Oh, no, that train originated in Wisconsin, and it is loaded with milk and cream that came from the pastures of Wisconsin and Illinois, and is being taken across the State of Indiana, and across the State of Kentucky, and across the State of Georgia, and then down to be used by the consuming public in Florida."

I said, "We get perfectly good milk around here; why doesn't the milk supply of Florida originate nearer, nearest the practicable point—the State of Georgia? I know that they can't raise dairy herds well in Florida because of the cow tick, but Georgia hasn't got it. Why don't we in Georgia raise the milk for Florida?"

He said: "That is one of the mysteries that we are all asking about." Here was milk coming half way across the United States.

Some three years ago we were in somewhat the same condition in this State, and my good friend the Commissioner of Health of the City of New York aided and abetted me in, shall I say, in avoiding or evading the Constitution of the United States. At that time, three years ago, the people of the City of New York were getting their milk from all over the United States. The New York State farmers and the nearby farmers of Pennsylvania and New Jersey and western Vermont called it bootleg milk when it came in from Iowa and Wisconsin and Maryland, and the Commissioner of Health very properly held that no milk should come into this city for the use of the families and the children of this city except that it come from an inspected source. In other words, except it were milk that had been approved as to its purity and obviously, it was quite impossible for the inspectors of the State Department of Health and the City Department of Health to inspect farms, dairy farms all over the United States. It was a physical impossibility, and the result was that we told some of our good friends out in the middle west and the upper south that we could only take milk into New York that had come from inspected sources, and then we did a selfish thing, if you like, but a thing which economically has been justified. We inspected the

dairy farms only in the State of New York and nearer points in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, and that is where this milk supply of this city now comes from. What is the result in planning? Your dairy farmer within this New York City milk shed knows approximately the need every day and the future. If he is told by the dairymen's league, the grange and the other organizations that there is too much milk being produced within that shed, he is apt to follow out the recommendations that he should not bring to maturity as many calves as he expected to.

On the other hand, if he knows that there is room for a greater consumption in the City of New York, he has the facts on which he can base a larger dairy herd, planning, and the result of that is that the dairy farmers within this metropolitan milk shed have suffered less from the depression during the past two years than any other set of dairy farmers within the United States.

Now, carry it farther from the practical point of view. A lot of us up-State-farmers think that New York State apples are better than any other apples in the world. But the consuming public prefer the Washington and the Oregon apple. Why? Because they are better wrapped and have pinker cheeks and they are better burnished. Now, I have nothing against the western apple, but the time is going to come when the apple growers of this State are going to realize that if they will emulate the apple packing of their brothers out on the Pacific coast, they will have their own market in their own neighborhood.

And so you could go on with agriculture, the treatment of which all over the United States is toward the regional application of planning. In other words, the saving of unnecessary cost, the bringing of the producer into closer contact with the consumer, and Heaven only knows that is one of the most vital problems of today. There is something wrong with the City of New York, and a lot of other cities when the farmer fifty or sixty miles away gets $2\frac{1}{2}$ and 3¢ a quart for his milk and the poor woman, the mother of a family in the city of New York pays 12 and 15¢ for that same milk the next day.

Those are problems which cannot be solved by any ukase; they might be solved by a miscellaneous but that isn't our method of going about things, we have got to solve those problems by planning and by the same token I think that we can apply the theory of planning those whole trends of population.

I have been rather an explorer in the general thought of land utilization. We have heard very often that land is the basis of all wealth. That is true. It has been exemplified by many theories in regard to taxes, by Henry George, and by many others. But their is an addition to that theme which is actually true. Land is not only the source of all wealth but it is also the wealth of all human happiness. Now, that is an important fact, an important factor in anything ahead. Let me illustrate. How many people are there out of employment to-day in this country? Well, if you believe the administration in Washington, four or five million; if you believe their opponent, nine or ten million. Take it half way between—a lot of people out of actual employment and add to those twice that number to represent their dependents. Where do most of those people exist? Where do they live to-day? Where is the dependent employment in this country? And now I am speaking in general terms, because there are thousands of exceptions that prove the rule.

Go through the smaller communities of this State, of New York or Connecticut. You will find no starvation, you will find no evictions, you will find few people who have not got an overcoat, or a pair of shoes, and in the same way if you go into the farming area, you won't find people starving on the farm. On the contrary, there is suffering, there is deprivation but there is not the same kind of thing of being up against it, or not knowing where you are going to sleep tonight, or where you are going to get the next meal tonight in the smaller communities and on the farms, as you will find in the cities of the country. And so I venture the assertion, that at least three-quarters and probably more, of the dependents unemployed throughout the United States, exist today in the cities of the United States. That brings up the question as to whether we have not gone far enough in talking

about the mere size of cities, whether we have not gone far enough in, what shall I call it, the old, now out-worn chamber of commerce idea of boosting.

In the old days not so long ago up the Hudson river there were four cities, Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Kingston, and Hudson and each one of them had a live chamber of commerce, and the chamber of commerce of the city of Poughkeepsie spent at least three-quarters of the time in running down Newburgh, Hudson and Kingston, and the other quarter of the time in talking about the advantages of Poughkeepsie. The chamber of commerce of Newburgh, adopted the same policy about Hudson, etc., and it was running down the other fellow in the hope that you would boost yourself, and they were thinking in terms of size of population and every ten years when the Government census taker came along and told one of those cities that it had 39,000 people the population rose up in arms and demanded a recount, because they were perfectly sure they had 45,000.

It is a great public issue. They wanted science, and I illustrate that mania throughout this nation by the story of a very charming lady who came out of the West in 1928, on a political mission and spent Sunday at the River with us. We drove her down through the city of Poughkeepsie to see some friends she had there, and on the way through Main street, going up through Main street she said, "It is a very nice little town, what is the population?"

I said, "About 42,000." I was taking census figures.

She said, "That is quite impossible, Mr. Roosevelt!" I said, "The United States Census said so."

She said, "It can't be. You have 170 skyscrapers here."

Is not it a false criteria, are we not beginning now to visualize a different kind of city, are we not beginning to visualize the possibility of a lower cost of living, having a greater percentage of our population living a little closer to the source of supply. So much closer that instead of fifteen cents a quart for milk they might be able to get for three cents, milk the farmer gets for six or seven cents. Some people will object and say that means more people putting out more agricultural products, and thereby increasing the existing surplus.

But put yourselves in the place of the mother of the family, who in her meager budget is able to buy a fifteen cent quart of milk a day for three or four children and can't afford more, if she could buy that milk for seven and a half cents, would she rest content with one quart? Of course not. She would buy two, and there you have got the health of the future of the race, as an added factor. I don't know much about the modern theories of medicine, but I do know that a great many of our doctor friends are laying a type of city life as being the cause for the increase in numbers, in our insane asylums throughout the country, and some eminent doctors making a survey of European cities have advanced the theory that city bred families, that is to say families bred under tenement house conditions, over a period of three or four generations die out, it may be a form of birth control, which this human race of ours is bringing to itself, whether it likes it or not. The excitement, cash, instead of a good supply in the cellar, and then the thought that is being thrown out that government in some miraculous way can in the future prevent any future economic depression, that government or some great leader will discover a panacea for the ills that have been hitting the world, even since history has been recorded.

And yet perhaps in the old days, planning regional planning could not have been done, we could not have avoided things because we did not have the facilities for fact-finding, we did not know enough about the elements of economics, we did not know enough about the changes in the social progress to make any prognostication for the future or to lay down a plan that would be worth the paper it was written on for more than a few years to come. One thing we have done, from this work that has been done by this commission and by the Chicago commission and by the many bodies that have been organized and are carrying on splendid work all through the United States, we are learning facts, we are learning something about ourselves, many things, perfectly obvious, now that they have been pointed out to us and other things, new discoveries. I am wondering if out of this Regional Planning which is

extended so widely throughout the country, we are not going to be in a position to take the bull by the horns in the immediate future and adopt some kind of an experimental work basis on a distribution of population.

We know from the economic point of view, that every skyscraper that goes up in this town puts a dozen older buildings out of business. It is an addition to wealth, on the one hand, but it is a decrease of wealth on the other hand.

We go glibly and gaily into new projects, for putting up more buildings without realizing that there is the kind of a limit which may mean that we are cutting off more than we are adding on. And that is not only true in the city, but it is true also in the suburbs and in the country.

I am convinced that one of the greatest values of this total regional planning is the fact that it dares us to make experiments and this country will remain progressive America just so long as we are willing to make experiments.

Just so long as we are able to say, "Here is a suggestion that sounds good, we can't guarantee it; let's try it out somewhere and see if it works."

Many years ago in Washington James Bryce came back here on a visit. And I happened to have the privilege of attending a dinner and after the dinner the men were sitting down in the smoking room and we got to talking about the governments of the world, and we asked Lord Bryce what he thought of the prominence of government, and he said there will be many changes. This was before the World War broke out, in most of the European governments, but he said, "I conceive it to be a wise guess, that the American Government will outlive all of the other existing governments of the world," and we said, "Why do you say that?"

He said, "For this reason: Modern civilization brings and will bring constantly new social and economic problems, which will have to be met, by some solution of a new character, because the problems are new, in every other country in the world, there is just one laboratory for the testing of the experiment. A laboratory which must make these tests throughout the nation, make it on a nation-wide scale. You in America have a different system. You have one central laboratory, but you have forty-eight other laboratories. And these problems that demand new solutions can be tested out by you in these forty-eight laboratories. And some of the remedies will prove of no use, other devised in these laboratories will prove efficacious, and out of all these forty-eight tests, you will gradually evolve a national remedy, to meet these new problems. Therein lies the advantage of America."

And so, I believe that this community, that the State of New York, and our sister states, of Connecticut and of New Jersey, are greatly to be congratulated, upon the work of this Regional Planning Committee; it has opened our eyes, to a new vista of the future, it has taken into account the social side, the economic side, the human side, and also the bricks and mortar side. The ports, the playgrounds, the highways, the transportation, and whether the environs of this city remains in the years to come at approximately the same population or whether they continue to grow, this regional plan will mark, I have no doubt, the foundation on which all building in the future will be based, based with changes perhaps, but to these men of great vision who have carried this great task to completion, to them we offer, and we owe a debt of gratitude, which will be repaid not only by us, but by our children and our children's children in all the days to come.