

question about the need to impose some order, logic and sensitivity on the disposition of a finite, irreplaceable asset, in both the public and the national interest.

The United States, land-rich for so long, has made exploitation an article of faith, but the laissez faire that built this country can now destroy it. This nation's recent history of Federal land use legislation is sad and sordid; rational and conservative Congressional proposals have been defeated repeatedly by misrepresentation and false fears. There is nothing un-American about federally assisted state surveys of land resources followed by local planning. The alternative is to cannibalize the country.

What is involved is food, shelter, natural resources, water and power, patterns of settlement and open space, nature and history, much of the economy and the total quality of life and the environment. We cannot continue to abuse the public trust and squander the public patrimony. Habitat has put the issue front and center.

## Public Patrimony

The political gavotte that marks most United Nations conferences was not missing from Habitat, the international meeting on human settlements recently held in Vancouver. The expected number of slanted resolutions were introduced to distort the issues and draw attention to the deep divisions between Arabs and Israelis and the developed and developing nations. This has become the routine background music to the larger themes.

Fortunately, the issues are more compelling than the games played with them. At Habitat, the closing resolutions dealt conspicuously with land use, a subject of universal urgency.

There is no disagreement that land is one of the most precious natural resources, even under the most disparate political and economic conditions. But it is also wealth and power. In the poorer nations extreme inequities in its distribution create extraordinary hardships. In affluent nations its speculative use leads to severe environmental damage and gross inefficiencies of settlement and development. The damage is a matter of kind and degree, but it is always irreversible.

How to deal with the damage breaks down according to ideology. Total control is deadly in result, and even large-scale control, such as that practiced in Britain since World War II, is being questioned now. But there is no