

PLANNING IS SOCIALISM'S TRADEMARK

By Maurice (Morris) Zeitlin, in The Communist Daily World, 11/8/75 (former Communist Daily Worker, founded in 1924. (Note ref. to Tchaikovsky Street in Moscow under blurred photo).

Cities in industrially-advanced countries develop complex economic, social and political interaction. In this process, major cities tend to consolidate neighboring smaller cities and settlements into metropolitan regions. Rationally, metropolitan regions should constitute governmental units having comprehensive planning and administrative powers within their boundaries.

In our country, rival capitalist groups, jealously guarding their special prerogatives, have rigidly maintained the traditional boundaries of states and counties while national economic and social development has created metropolitan regions that overlap those boundaries. We have no regional government and no comprehensive regional planning to speak of. Regional government and planning remain concepts our urban scholars and planners have long advocated in vain. We have only special, narrowly limited regional authorities such as the New York Port Authority empowered to promote the New York-New Jersey harbor or the Tennessee Valley Authority set up to control floods and generate electricity in the Tennessee Valley. Voluntary research agencies, such as the New York Regional Association, as certain regional interaction in some metropolitan regions and reveal to subscribing businessmen and local governments some regional data pertinent to their business activities.

In socialist countries, metropolitan regions enjoy metropolitan regional government and comprehensive regional planning.

Of the many regions on the vast territory of the Soviet Union, the Moscow Region commands special attention, for it has been, since the 1917 Revolution, the country's economic and political center. The multifarious functions of the capital city, the conglomeration of industries and scientific, technical and educational institutes, a population of 13 million and its skilled labor force made the Moscow Region one of the largest, most advanced and dynamic in the country. During the war and postwar years, Soviet planners had made full use of these attributes and considerably expanded the region's industrial base for the war and reconstruction efforts.

But the Moscow Region approaches the limits of useful expansion, for it lacks adequate raw materials and energy resources for much further industrial growth. *The long-range National Economic Plan has therefore shifted industrial expansion away from the Moscow Region to the vastly richer sites of raw material and energy resources in Siberia, the Far East, Kazakhstan and Middle Asia. It assigned the Moscow Region, and other similar regions the task of increasing their productivity chiefly through technological updating and refinement of existing production facilities.*

Accordingly, the National Economic Plan allocates development priorities in the Moscow Region to basic industries using high ratios of skilled labor and to service industries. Industries that do not fit the region's new economic profile, especially high energy and water consumers, importers of heavy and

bulky raw materials and users of obsolete buildings will either cease growing or move out of the region.

*The reduced industrial development will level off growth in regional jobs, hence in labor force and population. **During the early Five- Year Plans and postwar reconstruction, the population of Moscow and its region grew faster than the country's average. But this changed after 1959 when large industrial centers began developing in the country's peripheral regions.***

The population distribution within the Moscow Region has been extremely uneven in the past. Millions of Soviet citizens had followed the gravitation of industries to Moscow in the early period of the country's economic development and during and after the war, causing an excessive population density within the city. Peripheral areas of the region, on the other hand, lacked jobs and adequate social-cultural facilities. The Moscow Regional Plan set out to correct this imbalance. To start a process of population redistribution within the region it created two regional planning zones: the 5,400 square-mile inner zone comprising Moscow City and the 13,000 square-mile outer zone.

The inner zone includes suburbs and settlements bound so closely to the mother city by daily industrial, economic, social and cultural ties as to constitute a single urban complex. This area contains industries directly related to the city, the green-belt, the suburban agricultural economy, recreation establishments, the Moscow transportation network facilities, the municipal engineering services, and an open space reserve of 24,700 acres. It is rational, therefore, that it constitute a single overall planning unit. Within this zone, the Regional Plan severely limits further industrial expansion and anticipates a population growth of only 10% compared with a 100% growth in the outer zone.

*The integrity of Moscow's protective greenbelt is one of the Regional Plan's major concerns. Moscow's radial avenues and highways which allow the Region's population an easy access to the center of the city, also make it easy to get to the greenbelt's recreation facilities. **This asset has had its negative side. As Moscow grew, neighboring settlements tended to fuse with the city – along radial highways and railroads at first, and later in the spaces between them. Unchecked, this trend could lead to an endless expansion of the built-up urban area and a gradual loss of green spaces in and around the city. To prevent this, the Moscow City and Regional Plans put clear, rigorously enforceable restrictions against prohibited land uses within [print unreadable; "that area"? editor]***

We noted earlier that the existing distribution of settlements and work places within the Moscow Region are poorly related. About 500,000 people travel from the outer bounds of the region to work in Moscow, and over a million commute to work between different communities in the region. The uneven distribution of work places within the region is only partly responsible for this commutation pattern. It is mainly due to the propensity of workers to choose, out of the region's varied job pool, the jobs that suit their aptitudes or inclinations, regardless of location.

The Regional Plan had also worked out a strategy of attack on the relative underdevelopment in the outer zone by encouraging the fusion of small settlements into more productive urban units. The region embraces 69 cities and towns, 75 villages and a multitude of isolated homesteads. Though settlements with populations of 30,000 or more increased from 13 in 1939 to 35 in 1966, large populations still live

in settlements too small to be served with adequate community facilities. To raise their living standards, the Regional Plan sets up a system of urban centers in the outer zone endowed with magnetic capabilities, as it were, to attract and absorb surrounding small settlements. In this strategy, growing cities with populations of 100,000 or more will play the key role. The variety of jobs such cities generate will provide full employment as well as various municipal, cultural and every-day services to smaller settlements within about 25 miles of their centers.

Further, cities next in size will play a supporting role in the development of yet smaller cities within their range of economic and social influence. Within these spheres of influences, cities having populations between 20,000 and 100,000, strategically located among smaller rural settlements, will serve as the secondary urbanizing nuclei in the overall strategy of settlement upgrading. They will be developed as service centers to the rural populations.

Villages of up to 5,000 people, comprising several farm activities and rural industries, are assigned the role of tertiary "magnets" in this consolidation process. The Regional Plan thus hopes to reduce the number of rural villages in the region, by 1985, from 7,500 to about 1,800 and, ultimately, to 600 or 700 modern urban-type rural communities. Underlying this strategy is the basic goal of socialist society to do away with the difference between city and village. This goal, Soviet planners are convinced, can be reached only by raising the material and cultural standards of rural populations to those enjoyed in the cities.

*The Regional Plan assigns the delivery of services to the region's population in accord with its planning structure. In the inner zone, it encourages Moscow's suburbanites to make greater use of the capital's extensive services. In the outer zone, it allocates facilities and services to communities commensurate with their size and their assigned role as "attractors" or "attractees" within the settlement system. In addition, it distributes within the outer zone of the **region a series of new service institutions initiated by the capital's service system, special medical establishment, sanatoria, and a variety of recreational, sport and resort facilities.***

The economic and functional efficiencies and the social benefits that comprehensive national, regional and city planning make possible in socialist society explain the Soviet Union's enormous and rapid economic and social progress. *Conversely, our profit-oriented ruling capitalist class makes comprehensive social and economic planning impossible, causing waste and chaos and dragging the entire nation into misery and suffering as its rule deteriorates and declines.*

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