

The SEVENTH GENERATION

*"In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations."
- From the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy*

Planners and Bush II: Where Do We Go From Here?

By Tom Angotti and Chester Hartman
Issue Editors

We know it's not going to be easy for progressive politics in the next four years, but we knew that even with a Kerry administration there weren't going to be many good options. Congress is likely to deal with the enormous budget deficits that were caused by tax cuts and military expenditures by taking it out on social programs and making things even worse by dealing out more tax cuts and bigger military budgets. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid will be on the chopping block. So will Section 8, public housing, public transit and the remaining shreds of block grants. Cities and suburbs in the Blue states will get less from Washington, corporate welfare moochers and ex-urbanites will get more.

For people and organizations working in communities whose basic survival has long been in question, the apocalypse has never been that far away and fighting collective depression has been a full-time job. Progressive urban planners and community activists are facing some difficult challenges, but most of the people we work with can't afford to drop out.

There are a few things we have to work with in the coming years. First, as Frances Fox Piven continues to remind us, progressives can't accomplish anything of great significance unless they hook up with nascent protest movements. Opposition to the barbarous occupation of Iraq is bound to continue, and urban planners, the experts on cities, have a special role to play by drawing attention to the destruction of cities, the phony participatory process erected under military rule and the thoroughly inadequate rebuilding of cities that is making preferred contractors rich without necessarily restoring the urban infrastructure. Let's make it a point to analyze the US plan for Fallujah, which includes absolute control by the military administration of all human movements in and out of the city and within the city. New surveillance technology will subject every Iraqi to 24-hour scrutiny. This Orwellian experiment

will be at the expense of Iraqi citizens, but we know that such innovations practiced on foreign populations have often pioneered domestic systems in low-income communities of color.

Planners must find their voice in the coming struggles to save the entitlement programs. Poverty among the elderly and infirm will grow in cities and suburbs if Social Security is undermined by privatization. Homelessness and ghettoization will grow if Section 8 and public housing go under. So far, however, the planning profession hasn't done a whole lot on these issues. We need to find our way around the planning profession's infatuation with "smart growth" and "new urbanism," which too often obscures or conceals issues of social equity. By focusing excessively on physical planning, the planning profession is blithely complicit in the destruction of the social safety net.

Progressive planners need to bring their voices into the mainstream planning profession. The American Planning Association (APA) is the largest professional planning organization in the US. On March 19-23, the APA will hold its annual meeting in San Francisco and, if past performance is any indicator, the organization will evade taking a strong position on the war in Iraq and the major social issues confronting cities and suburbs. APA is a multi-million dollar marketing outfit and must be sensitive to its "users," who include local planners in the Red states. Their annual conference is a big exposition for the hawking of APA brands and products. While APA usually joins some progressive lobbying efforts in Washington, especially when the programs that provide the bread and butter to planners are threatened, it is now time for them to join with other coalitions to challenge the bi-partisan drift towards the complete destruction of the social contract. Progressive planners in the Civil Rights Movement brought APA around decades ago, and it's time for another challenge. Also, the labor movement and many progressive organizations are looking for new allies as they face increasing threats to their very survival. The turmoil in the Democratic Party suggests that it's time for the old institutions nominally dedicated to reform and social change to get serious and go back to their roots.

PROGRESSIVE PLANNING

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Statement of Principles

The Planners Network is an association of professionals, activists, academics, and students involved in physical, social, economic, and environmental planning in urban and rural areas, who promote fundamental change in our political and economic systems. We believe that planning should be a tool for allocating resources and developing the environment to eliminate the great inequalities of wealth and power in our society, rather than to maintain and justify the status quo. We are committed to opposing racial, economic, and environmental injustice, and discrimination by gender and sexual orientation. We believe that planning should be used to assure adequate food, clothing, housing, medical care, jobs, safe working conditions, and a healthful environment. We advocate public responsibility for meeting these needs, because the private market has proven incapable of doing so.

PROGRESSIVE PLANNING

The Magazine of Planners Network

No. 162

www.plannersnetwork.org

Winter 2005

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GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Progressive Planning seeks articles that describe and analyze progressive physical, social, economic and environmental planning in urban and rural areas. Articles may be up to 2,000 words. They should be addressed to PN's broad audience of professionals, activists, students and academics, and be straightforward and jargon-free. Following a journalistic style, the first paragraph should summarize the main ideas in the article. A few suggested readings may be mentioned in the text, but do not submit footnotes or a bibliography. The editors may make minor style changes, but any substantial rewriting or changes will be checked with the author. A photograph or illustration may be included. Submissions on disk or by email are greatly appreciated. Send to the Editor at tangotti@hunter.cuny.edu or Planners Network, c/o Hunter College Dept of Urban Planning, 695 Park Ave., New York, NY 10021. Fax: 212-772-5593. Deadlines are January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1.

Upcoming Topics (articles welcome):

- Global Warming and Energy
- Design, Arts and Culture
- Race and Planning
- Indigenous Planning