

## The Road to Supercapitalism

Planning in the UK is going through a major transformation. The new Planning Bill<sup>1</sup> published in November creates the legislative framework to implement the government's White Paper, *Planning for a Sustainable Future*<sup>2</sup> and is the culmination of reviews on housing, transport infrastructure, climate change and energy security. On first reading the Bill pushes the right buttons, it talks about accountability, democracy, transparency, climate change and sustainable development. It introduces an independent commission of experts to review the government's National Policy Statements and nationally significant infrastructure projects, a carrot in the form of a Community Infrastructure Levy payable to Local Authorities, and recommends the formation of a new parliamentary Select Committee. This will comprise of members from existing Select Committees such as Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, but no mention of Health. The Bill reduces the detail of planning guidance to speed up the planning process with central government strengthening its role in directing the location of major infrastructure projects. Many of the new structures reflect a desire to bring together the juxtaposed values of social democracy and neoliberal economics.

In reality the Bill represents the government's deluded aspiration to secure sustainable economic growth. It will help push through new airports, roads and power stations: all significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Local Authorities will have little choice in challenging major developments as they could provide precious resources for cash strapped health and social care services. More public land will be privatised and conflict between the health interests of the local population and the financial gains of 'big business' and developers will be an inevitability. The whole approach to reforming Planning specifically and the public sector generally ignores the deep rooted ideological differences between public and private sector agencies as to how we should create sustainable health and sustainable environments, thus driving us further down the road to what Robert Reich calls supercapitalism.<sup>3</sup>

Supercapitalism is the latest and most virulent form of a social pandemic flu. It is characterized by widening health, social and economic inequalities, anxiety about job loss, and environmental destruction in the pursuit of economic growth and efficiency. We are encouraged to exert power as consumers at the expense of citizenship and democratic processes.

A wonderful line in Reich's book is "as citizens, we have ideals, but as consumers, we have needs. We abhor child labor, for instance, but we want a cheap pair of jeans. And we might be dismayed over Main Street's demise, but we still look for bargains at Walmart " (read Primark).

My new year's resolution is to think more broadly as a citizen and less like a consumer.

If you wish to work with the Politics of Health Group on this or any other public health issues please contact Debbie at [contact@pohg.org.uk](mailto:contact@pohg.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> Her Majesty's Government. *Planning Bill 2007* <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2007-08/planning.html>

<sup>2</sup> Communities and Local Government. *Planning for a Sustainable Future 2007*

<sup>3</sup> Reich R. *Supercapitalism: The Transformation of Business, Democracy, and Everyday Life*. Borzoi, 2007