Look What the Brits Have Done!

Review by George C. Leef

THEY MEANT WELL:
Government Project Disasters,
By D. R. Myddelton
242 pages; Institute of Economic Affairs, 2007

Those of us who favor limited government argue that when the state gets involved in projects that can be done by private enterprise, the results are almost certain to be bad. We would be best off with a firm rule against such endeavors for two reasons: First, government officials are apt to undertake projects that should not be done at all. Second, even if they hit upon a potentially worthwhile venture, they will approach it in a very inefficient manner. Politicians and bureaucrats are not spending their own money and do not stand to lose if they are wrong. Therefore, resources will be wasted.

In *They Meant Well*, Cranfield University professor D. R. Myddelton examines six government project disasters in Great Britain. He employs his expertise in finance and accounting to good effect by digging into the political economy of several British boondoggles: the R.101 airship, the "groundnut scheme" in East Africa, British nuclear power, the Concorde, the Channel Tunnel, and the Millennium Dome. Both Conservative and Labour governments presided over those fiascos, and the results range from almost comical to utterly tragic. The common thread among them is that the politicians overestimated benefits, underestimated costs, did not know when to stop, and stuck the public with a big tab.

AIRSHIPS Myddelton begins with a story that today seems quaint — the British government's determination to have a fleet of airships providing passenger service to the far-flung outposts of the Empire. Blimps would quietly float people to India, Australia, Egypt, Canada, and other places.

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The idea found favor with the Conservative government in 1922. When the Labour Party came to power the following year, it chose not to cancel the program, but to approve (and subsidize) both a private enterprise airship (the R.100) and an airship to be designed and built by the Air Ministry's Royal Airship Works (the R.101).

Blimps were nothing new in the early 1920s, but they had never been used for long-distance travel. No one knew if the many engineering challenges could be solved, but the politicians were eager for the program to continue. Originally, the first flight was to take place in 1927, but it was not until 1930 that either airship was ready.

In January 1930, the private enterprise R.100 was tested in all weather conditions and in July made a flight to Canada and back. Not bad. That put pressure on the government's R.101 team to prove what they could do. Tragedy ensued.

A flight to India was planned, but as Myddelton writes, "This was plainly going to be the most difficult flight that any British airship had ever made. It would be in an experimental airship that in its lengthened form had never flown at full power or under adverse weather conditions, and which had been suffering from serious gasbag and cover defects. Quite apart from all the technical problems, the crew of the R.101 had flown for only a few hours together." Leaving its mooring on the evening of October 4, 1930, the airship struggled across the English Channel in bad weather. Just after 2 A.M., the R.101 crashed in northern France and burst into flames. Only six of the 54 people aboard survived.

After the crash of its government-built cousin, the R.100 never flew again. Myddelton reports that British taxpayers sunk £2.4 million (equal to £100 million today) into development of both airships. Rapid improvements in airplanes combined with the Hindenburg disaster in 1931 put an abrupt end to the dreams of airship service throughout the British Empire.

GROUNDNUTS The second of Myddelton's fiascos is the "groundnut scheme." ("Groundnuts" is the British term for peanuts.) In the aftermath of World War II, Labour officials became captivated by a proposal to grow groundnuts on a vast scale in the colony of Tanganyika. The crop was being grown there on a small scale and officials were eager for a way to supplement the low ration of fats in the ordinary British diet. (Food rationing was even more restrictive in the UK after the war than during it, thanks to Labour's socialist policies.) The director of agriculture for Tanganyika suggested planting 100,000 acres of groundnuts; by the time the starry-eyed politicians were through with the idea, it had expanded 30-fold. A commissioned study reported that within five years of the planned 1947 start, the project would be harvesting 600,000 tons per year.

You would think that such a huge undertaking would be based on some research showing its feasibility. In a paragraph that leaves the reader dazed in disbelief, Myddelton writes:

> Wakefield recommended an extensive scientific research programme for the first two years, covering meteorology, soil fertility, studies and mapping, crop disease surveys and variety testing. But this research was to follow, not precede, the confident proposal for growing groundnuts on a vast

> scale. It seems not to have occurred to anyone that the research might result in new knowledge calling for fundamental changes in the whole scheme.

Real investors do not, of course, plunk down money for a project prior to the research to see if it will work. But we are dealing with politicians here.

The groundnut scheme was a series of comical blunders. First, there was the problem of clearing the land. Doing so would require a large number of tractors, but in East Africa there were hardly any. Once they were purchased and shipped in, another difficulty presented itself: among the natives, almost no one had any experience in the use or maintenance of such machinery. Most of the tractors broke down, leading to the jest, "Give us the job and we will finish the tools!"

Faithful to Labour's ideology, Myddelton reports, "The Colonial Office sent two men to help the Africans form their own local trade union, but they promptly decided to go on strike in support of the dock workers at Dar Es Salaam."

Many of the areas assumed to be suitable for groundnut cultivation proved to be anything but. The soil turned out to be deficient in nutrients and was composed mainly of hard quartz sand. Rainfall was another problem: one of the regions chosen was called by natives "the country of perpetual drought."

The results of the first year were pathetic — only 5 percent of the planned acreage was planted. That, however, did nothing to dampen enthusiasm for the program back in London. The project went forward for a second year, and that harvest was actually smaller than the amount of seed planted.

Finally, common sense prevailed and the government stopped throwing money into the stupendous folly. Still, taxpayers spent £46 million for almost nothing.

PRESTIGE The next three projects all had one feature in common: they were animated by a quest for national prestige. Nuclear power, the Concorde, and the Channel Tunnel were all projects where cost/benefit analysis was tossed aside because politicians hungered for something to get people thinking, "Look what the Brits have done!" Naturally, all three turned out to be high in cost and low in tangible benefit. Whether taxpayers felt that the "prestige" of those projects compensated for their losses is doubtful.

The nuclear power program began in 1955. Winston Churchill's last government was persuaded by power experts that, in addition to elevating British technical prestige, going nuclear would be much more efficient than generating electricity from fossil fuels. But, as you would expect, the cost of building the plants proved to be far higher than the experts had forecast. At the same time, the price of fossil fuels declined. For more than three decades, nuclear power was a huge drain on the government's finances. Myddelton writes, "The size of the cost underestimates even in the late 1980s, after 30 years' experience, seems hard to attribute to mere error. It seems more likely that there was at least an element of deliberate deception, which came to light only when the industry leaders had to take personal responsibility for the cost and other specific estimates in the prospectus."

> **Politicians hungered for something to get people thinking, "Look what the Brits have done!"**

That responsibility arose when Margaret Thatcher moved power generation out of being a government monopoly and into the world of free market competition. The grand experiment in socialized nuclear power cost more than the other blunders combined, some £32 billion.

The Concorde was another instance where politicians got carried away with a project that was seen as a means of enhancing national prestige with little thought given to commercial realities. Having Britain build the world's first supersonic airliner and "leapfrogging the Americans" was a dream that first took hold in the late 1950s. But would there be enough demand for supersonic airplanes to make it a paying proposition? A committee report glowingly forecast that by 1970, the world demand would be as high as 500 planes. Years later, though, the official responsible for that estimate admitted that his department "made no attempt at all to estimate the size of the potential market."

Eventually, a joint venture was agreed to with the French. (The supposed quid pro quo was French support for British entrance into the Common Market; Charles de Gaulle reneged on that promise soon thereafter.) The collaboration made for numerous delays and inefficiencies. In the end, the Anglo-French engineering team succeeded in conquering the many design problems and producing a lovely airplane. The trouble was that no one wanted to buy it. The Concorde's speed did not make up for its high cost and low payload. Only the two captive national airlines, Air France and British Airways, bought the Concorde. Airlines that did not care about national prestige were not interested in a plane whose cost per seat-mile was three times that of the Boeing 747. Myddelton places the loss to British taxpayers at £9.1 billion.

I will skip over Myddelton's chapter on the Channel Tunnel except to say that it was a case where political meddling turned what could have been a profitable private venture into a loser, requiring extensive government subsidies.

DOME We come at last to the Millennium Dome, a fiasco begun under John Major's Conservative government and reluctantly continued under Tony Blair's Labour government. After all the other blunders, you might think that British politicians would have learned to shy away from projects that should be done by private enterprise, if at all. But none of the earlier cases Myddelton analyzes seem to have had serious adverse political consequences; maybe British voters have a soft spot for politicians who do foolish things but mean well.

In June 1994, the Conservatives created a Millennium Commission to oversee public events in the year 2000. Its chairman proposed a great exhibition to run for the entire year. That was not a novel idea; London's Great Exhibition of 1851 had attracted more than six million paying visitors in less than six months' time and earned a profit. That was private enterprise at work, though. The Dome would prove to be most unprofitable.

Where to put the project was the first big decision. An abandoned industrial site at Greenwich was chosen. That made it somewhat inconvenient to London, but if a new Underground line was finished in time, the transportation problems would not be too bad. Greenwich was chosen for political reasons (high unemployment), not because it was the ideal location. Investors quickly turned thumbs down. "Commission partners were sought, but without success: there were just too many uncertainties. There was no property developer for Greenwich, no exhibition operator and there were no investors," Myddelton writes.

With the Dome off to a bad start, many in the Labour Party favored abandoning the project when they took power in 1997. Tony Blair, however, wanted to press on. Construction was completed in 1998, but no exact plan for the exhibition had been chosen. Was it going to be educational? An amusement park? A trade fair?

Throughout 1999, progress was made on the project. The Underground line was completed on time, some corporate sponsors signed on to the exhibition, and the content of the exhibits was decided upon. The Commission prepared for a gala opening on January 1, 2000, sending out tickets to 10,000 special guests.

But they were sent out too late. So the officials decided to issue the tickets at the new Underground station. Alas, it was not large enough to handle the big crowd. Thousands of invitees waited for up to four hours for their security checks, their tickets, and finally their trains to Greenwich. Many arrived too late for the opening celebration. With typical British understatement, Myddelton says that opening night was "something of a disaster."

Thereafter, things continued to go badly. Consumer demand fell well short of projections. Most of the promotional budget was spent in the six months prior to the opening, which meant that the materials did not explain what the Dome was about — most of those decisions were made after they had been printed. Cash received from sponsors was less than expected and operating expenses were higher. The Dome was closed at the end of 2000, having cost the government over £1 billion. Before being razed, however, the Dome did make a brief appearance in a James Bond film.

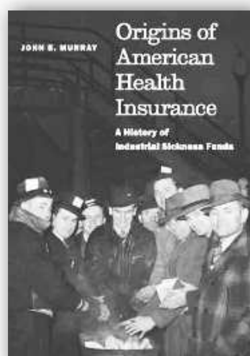
What can we learn from this intriguing history of blunders? The big lesson is that governments should stick to their knitting — that is, doing those things essential for the protection of life, liberty and property. The rest should be left to private enterprise R

Before Socialized Medicine

Review by George C. Leef

ORIGINS OF AMERICAN HEALTH INSURANCE: A History of Industrial Sickness Funds
by John E. Murray
313 pages; Yale University Press, 2007

An old saying is that history is written by the winners. That used to be true, but isn't any longer. The losers often write their own versions and such histories now tend to follow this template: *We were righteous and had the good ideas, but were defeated by forces of evil and greed that used money and deceit to prevail.* That is the standard line used, for example, by advocates of socialized medical care to explain why the Clinton administration's big 1993 health care reform bill died in a Democratic Congress. It was a grand, visionary plan done in by the nefarious insurance companies. Losers craft their histories to defend their purity and perhaps set the stage for a win later on.



In his new book *Origins of American Health Insurance*, University of Toledo economist John Murray investigates a century-old instance of this phenomenon, namely the defeat of the Progressives' zealous push for government benefits for sick workers. Such "social insurance" had taken root in Europe — most notably in Bismarck's Germany — and reformers were adamant that the United States needed to emulate and improve upon the German model. Their proposals were not, however, adopted and the losers wrote the history of the dispute to fit the story line of virtue defeated by nasty special interests. According to that narrative, the United States would have adopted this enlightened approach to sickness insurance around the turn of the last century if it had not been for the opposition of business and the shortsightedness of many workers.

Implicit in that view is the belief that the existing modes for dealing with the problem of sick workers were woefully unsatisfactory. But were they? Murray's finding will not surprise people who understand the market process — the various kinds of voluntary sickness funds then available were, on the whole, capably run and gave sick workers as much or more support than did the "model" statist European plans. According to Murray, "Industrial sickness funds provided the service that workers most desired — paid sick leave — and skimped on provision of medical care that at best was ineffective and at worst a cover for coercing sick workers to return to their posts. It was the success, not the incompetence, of the sickness funds that led to the failure of Progressive reform efforts."

THE FUNDS Alexis de Tocqueville famously noted that 19th century Americans were very good at forming voluntary associations to deal with problems. As the United States changed from a mostly agrarian nation in the early part of the century into one with large business firms employing great numbers of workers in the latter part, the problem of keeping sick or injured workers and their families out of the poorhouse presented itself. Back then, most people turned to voluntary action rather than government to solve problems. Thus was born the concept of the industrial sickness fund.

There were two kinds of such funds. One type, the "establishment fund," was organized within a firm, sometimes with management taking the lead and sometimes the workers themselves doing so. The second type was organized by a labor union for its members, and the union typically would advertise the fund as a major benefit of being a union member. (One important sidelight of the book is that it shows how differently labor unions operated in the era prior to the New Deal's "pro-labor" legislation.)

Murray unearths a wealth of information about both kinds of funds. Like any other innovation, sickness funds faced a learning curve. Some failed, but most succeeded and learned from their (and others') mistakes, exemplifying the market's discovery process. Most importantly, they performed their function well enough that when the reformers came along peddling the idea of government as the source of sickness benefits, the reformers found — to their annoyance and dismay — that there was little interest in their proposals. Murray paints a complicated picture that demonstrates a simple point: freedom works.

How did the sickness funds operate? A worker would apply for admission. Few funds imposed any restriction based on race or other prejudices, but they did have some prudential restrictions to keep out workers who, because of age or indications of pre-existing medical problems, would likely be a severe drain on the fund. They also imposed a waiting period of several weeks. After admission, the worker would pay an initiation fee and a premium each pay period, generally around one percent of his earnings. If he became ill, he would inform the fund manager and a committee of other workers would typically visit him to ascertain that he really was too sick to work. (Murray devotes a lot of attention to the "moral hazard" problem.) Sometimes a medical doctor would make that determination. Assuming that the worker's claim was approved, he would then receive cash payments equal to about half his regular pay. Some funds also paid benefits for unemployment, medical treatment, or death.

CHOICE This system — not really a system at all, but instead thousands of individual and varied approaches to dealing with the problem of worker sickness — proved to be quite popular with many businesses and labor unions. Many firms set up sickness funds for their workers out of self-interest. Having such benefits available to workers actually increased productivity, some found. If a worker took some time off at the onset of an illness, he would often be ready to return to work sooner than if he kept on working and made his condition severe. Some businesses followed that logic a step further and instituted programs of medical care even though, as Murray notes, medical care was not very effective until the 1930s.

> **Back then, most people turned to voluntary action rather than government to solve problems.**

Labor unions also established sickness funds as a means of attracting members. One advantage they had was portability of benefits. Workers could move between employers within an industry — coal mining, for instance — and not have to reapply and pay a new initiation fee. Some unions created insurance and medical care programs, too. Union leaders did not uniformly oppose the Progressive drive to replace voluntary sickness funds with government programs, but many of them did, including Samuel Gompers. Murray writes that in Gompers' view, "compulsion was a patronizing criticism of workers who were seen by Progressives as incompetent to make their own decisions about such things."

Freedom of choice was important to both labor and management back then. Of all companies where workers had the option of joining a sickness fund (establishment or union), a little less than half did so. The fact that a majority of workers preferred keeping the small payroll deduction for themselves rather than paying for sickness fund coverage was significant. The policies the Progressives advocated would have taken freedom of choice away.

The Progressive coalition was centered on an organization named the American Alliance for Labor Legislation (AALL). Its primary spokesman was one Isaac Rubinow, a Russian émigré who worked as a medical doctor among New York's poor. He became the leading advocate of German-style welfarism and his book *Social Insurance* was very influential among intellectuals. His argument was that workers could not or would not save enough on their own and sickness funds did not provide sufficient benefits. His solution, of course, was for the government to step in to force the right outcomes.

Opposing the AALL were unions and businesses, including insurance companies that did not want government setting foot on terrain that was or might become profitable to them. Although group health insurance was still a few decades in the future, life insurance was actuarially sound and profitable. When the Progressives decided to include death benefits in the coverage workers would receive, they brought a powerful enemy into the fray: Frederick Hoffman, a statistician with Prudential. Hoffman would become the deadliest foe of the Progressives, repeatedly showing factual and logical errors in their arguments.

Murray points to an important subtext in the Progressive case. One reason Bismarck had worked so hard for his system of social insurance in Germany was to make people feel dependent on the state. Bismarck said, "If the worker must pay, the effect on him is lost" because he would then see that he had himself earned the money to pay for the benefits. Seemingly "free" sickness pay would, however, make workers grateful to government. The Progressive reformers had similar motivations. Their entire program would be easier to implement if people felt that they had to look to the government for security.

EXTINCTION Owing to their rhetorical excesses and opposition from business and labor, the Progressives failed to get any state to adopt their model legislation. Nevertheless, today there are only some tiny vestiges of the sickness funds. What brought about their demise?

Murray shows that their extinction came about because of the development of actuarial science and the resulting rise in health insurance firms. By the late-1930s, insurance companies had developed the data upon which they could write group health insurance policies. A few of the larger sickness funds tried to use the improved actuarial knowledge to upgrade their operations, but it was too late — the advantages of group health insurance swamped them.

The book concludes with a comparison between the history of the sickness funds and the contemporary battle over nationalized health care. Just as the Progressives tried to portray the status quo as woeful, so do the advocates of nationalized health care. And just as the Progressives made some outlandish claims in an effort to win people over to their side, so do the advocates of nationalized health care. Murray writes, "So far our polity has looked on the present health insurance system much as it looked on the sickness funds of the early twentieth century: as not perfect but not obviously worse than the state-led alternative."

Origins digs deep into a long-forgotten nook of American history. It is an admirable piece of research that makes a terribly useful point: voluntary institutions can solve problems much better than people usually give them credit. R

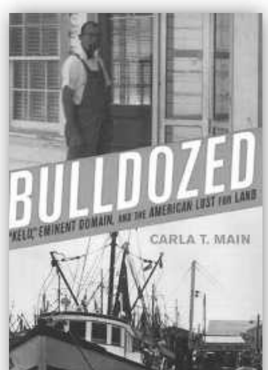
Destination: Freeport Texas

Review by George C. Leef

BULLDOZED
By Carla T. Main
276 pages; Encounter Books, 2007

In 2005, eminent domain became a hot national issue as a result of the Supreme Court's decision in *Kelo v. New London*. While property rights scholars and libertarian activists had long known about the nasty, authoritarian business of taking private property away from people through eminent domain and then transferring it to others who were expected to make "better" use of it, *Kelo's* holding that it was permissible under the Constitution for governments to seize property for "economic development" purposes outraged great numbers of Americans. The palpable unfairness of tossing poor homeowners out just so a business can put up a new mall, hotel, or office complex that would increase the city's tax collections brought together a broad coalition of Americans who wanted to see the law reformed.

The anti-*Kelo* movement won a few victories in state legislatures, but lost others. Today, much of the steam seems to have gone out of it. With the publication of former *National Law Journal* editor Carla Main's book *Bulldozed*, however, the reform movement should get a jolt of new energy. It is an incendiary book that centers on a protracted and highly revealing eminent domain battle in Freeport, Texas, where a family's efforts to save their small business from condemnation was of Alamo proportions — but with the defenders holding out. What makes *Bulldozed* so compelling is the wealth of detail Main presents on the slimy, despicable tactics used by city officials in an effort to get their way. Thus, the book is not just a lesson about eminent domain, but also a lesson on the ugly truth about local government "democracy."



A DESTINATION Freeport is a grimy industrial town on the Old Brazos River, a few miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. The dominant feature of the landscape is a Dow Chemical plant that employs most of the local labor force. It is a poor city with an annual budget of only $13 million. Freeport's website tries to depict the city as an alluring tourist spot, but in fact there is very little to attract vacationers and much to repel them.

City officials were not content to govern over such a mundane place. Suffering from a bad case of glitz-envy, they concocted a plan to boost the economy with a marina. It would be a privately owned enterprise that would be built by a wealthy scion of a Houston oil family, mostly with funds from the city's meager budget. This was a classic "heads I win, tails you lose" deal from the builder's perspective.

As if that were not bad enough, the plans called for land along the river owned by the Western Seafood Company. Western Seafood had been founded in 1950 by the Gore family and it was truly one of those "up by the bootstraps" stories. The business, which bought from and sold to the shrimp trawlers that fish the Gulf was one of the largest employers and taxpayers in Freeport.

City officials, however, were enamored with the idea that the marina could be a catalyst for other investments such as hotels and restaurants that would turn their town into a "destination." They were eager to shove the Gores out so they could have their marvelous marina.

RUNNING ROUGHSHOD Throughout the book, Main gives readers insights into the petty, pathetic tyranny of Freeport's government, tyranny greatly exacerbated by the lust for privately owned land. The first insight concerns the notice officially given to the Gores that the city had designs on their property. There wasn't any. On September 8, 2003, a fax was sent to the offices of Western Seafood. Without any cover sheet or other explanation, the document that came through had been issued by the Army Corps of Engineers. It said "Public Notice" at the top, without any indication that it had particular relevance to Western Seafood. Fortunately, Wright Gore read through it anyway. The document was a lot of legalese, but he figured out that it meant that a marina was planned for their section of the river, cutting off access to the fishing trawlers that were their livelihood. And when he got to the end, he was stunned to read that public comments were due by September 12.

If Gore had not read through the anonymous fax, he would not have been able to respond in time and would thereby have lost the possibility of objecting to the taking of his property. That was just the first of several instances where the city ran roughshod over the idea of due process of law.

The Gores got their attorney, who had to quickly master the intricacies of eminent domain procedure, into action immediately. Working frantically, he was able to stave off confiscation of the Western Seafood property and turned what the city had hoped would be a quick knockout into a bloody 15-round fight. After more than three years of litigation that has cost the Gore family over $450,000, it appears the city has been defeated. But as Yogi Berra said, "It ain't over 'til it's over." With eminent domain, it is never really over.

A crucial point about Freeport that Main stresses is that its unfriendly attitude toward business has much to do with its poor economic condition. Paperwork and bureaucratic obstruction make it such a headache to set up and run a business that most people just give up trying. The downtown area is mostly a wasteland of empty storefronts. A lady who wanted to open a muffin shop threw in the towel after hearing about all the city's requirements. Property owners were nickel-and-dimed to death with a stream of fees.

But instead of changing their ways and waiting for entrepreneurs to discover Freeport, city officials set their sights on economic revitalization through a grand, visionary central planning scheme. In Freeport, as in so many other places, politicians prefer coercion to freedom as the means of achieving their objectives. They would rather throw the dice on one big idea than set the right conditions to attract many small investments — exactly what Public Choice theory would predict.

The city had come up with a comprehensive redevelopment plan that hardly anyone knew about. It was not publicized, and if you wanted a copy, you had to make a request under the Texas Open Records Law. Not only would a marina wipe out Western Seafood, but the entire East End section of town — an area of small homes owned by poor families — was declared to be "severely blighted."

LAME-BRAINED SCHEME Much of *Bulldozed* is a blow-by-blow account (including quite a few low blows) of the legal warfare, but along the way Main (a lawyer herself) gives the reader a primer on eminent domain law in general. She goes back to two cases Daniel Webster argued (and, unfortunately, lost) before the Supreme Court in the 1840s, cases that began the process of undermining property rights. A century later, in *Berman v. Parker*, the Supreme Court would declare that the courts should defer to the ideas of local officials as to the "best use" for land. In 2005, *Kelo* was a brave fight against bad precedents that fell just short.

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As to the marina plan, Main argues convincingly that it was a lame-brained scheme. Why would wealthy boat owners want to think about docking along a dirty old river dotted with industrial plants and rusting derelicts? Like so many other ideas that politicians dream up to "invest" other people's money, the Freeport marina looked like a big flop that would leave the overburdened taxpayers struggling with increased debt. Propaganda by the city to persuade residents that the private party was taking the risk was the height of deception.

The Gores thought that one way of heading off the seizure of their business would be to arouse public opinion. Wright set up a primitive website telling all he had found out about the redevelopment plan. For that temerity, he was promptly sued by the rich Houstonian — but he refused to back down. When other opponents began questioning whether the city was going to condemn houses, officials heatedly denied that even one would be taken, although the "blight" designation is invariably used to justify a taking. Efforts at distributing information door-to-door were checked by enforcement of an obscure ordinance. But when city officials wanted to get their own ideas out, they absconded with the run of a local advertising paper and stuffed their flyers into each paper before distributing them. In short, the political establishment played some very dirty pool.

"Well, it's too bad that people are sometimes forced out through eminent domain," some readers may be thinking, "but at least they're fully compensated, aren't they?" Actually, that is seldom the case. When governments take property, they usually find "experts" to low-ball the appraisal and never offer to pay for incidental expenses such as moving. While the Freeport case did not get to the compensation stage, Main's discussion of other cases, especially the infamous Poletown case in Detroit, makes it clear that when governments use eminent domain, the results are hardly different from robbery. It is enough to make you laugh at the claim of these politicians that they "represent" the people they are victimizing.

An unexpected, favorable ruling by a state court judge threw a monkey wrench into the city's plans. At enormous expense, the Gores have apparently been able to keep what is theirs.

The great lesson of *Bulldozed* is that politicians should not be trusted with the power to remake cities according to their own visions. It is quite appalling that in a town where many of the poor residents just wanted better protection from flooding, the politicians were only interested in squandering taxpayer money on a hallucination that Freeport could be transformed into a glittering tourist destination. "Economic development" takings distract politicians from doing the best they can to govern the city they've got and induce them to dream up grandiose ideas about creating the city they would like to rule. R