

Habitat set for row on land use

PROPOSALS that all governments should accept the principle that "use and tenure of land should be subject to public control" are likely to kindle hot controversy when Habitat, the United Nations conference on Human Habitations, opens here tomorrow.

Adoption of this, and a parallel statement that windfall development profits "should be recaptured for the benefit of society as a whole," are expected to be strongly resisted, particularly by the United States.

The proposals will also cause considerable embarrassment to Canada, the host country, which is now in the middle of a big political row about the whole question of land speculation and the alleged failure of private enterprise planning.

Barney Danson, the Minister for Urban Affairs, who will probably chair the conference, is believed to have a cautious sympathy for extending public ownership, but almost every other member of Trudeau's Cabinet is opposed.

Britain's recently adopted Community Land Act, reinforced by the new development gains tax, are certain to be closely examined by the 2,000 delegates from 140 nations who are now gathering for what is claimed to be the biggest meeting the UN has ever held. The UK has sent a large delegation, headed by Peter Shore, Secretary for the Environment, and John Silkin, the architect of the new legislation. But Whitehall officials, alert to the sensitive nature of the subject, are quick to emphasise that our policy falls well short of wholesale land nationalisation.

The fear is that the two-week conference could break up, or face deadlock, if a majority, including those nations which permit no private land ownership, insists on forcing through a really radical statement of principles.

If that can be avoided, Habitat optimists hope the meeting will produce a useful, hard-headed list of proposals for housing, in decent conditions, the 4 billion expected to join the human race in the next 30 years—as well as the tens of millions already homeless or living in wretched shanty towns.

But Danson has already warned delegates they will get nowhere unless they cool their debates. This could apply particularly to the Palestine Liberation Organisation group, which Canada reluctantly admitted as observers. Their spokesmen have already said publicly that they intend to use Habitat to promote the PLO cause. The Mayor of Vancouver, Art Phillips, and nine out of 10 city aldermen, recently voted to cancel the conference because of security fears. They were overruled by Ottawa, which instead provided a \$30,000 subsidy for extra police.

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