

CHAPTER 2

Reaching for the Zoning Club

There is nothing more important for those who think they believe in freedom, in free enterprise and in private property, than bringing these high-flown generalities to bear on the concrete problems of their daily lives. It is very easy to say, or believe, that one is devoted to freedom, so long as freedom remains a lofty and unanalyzed generality. There is nothing, of course, wrong with such generalities; on the contrary, they are indispensable for any thought or action on this vital subject. But, to be effective or meaningful, they must not remain on the level of generalities; they must be brought down and applied, consistently and with determination, to our daily lives.

Take, for one among an infinite number of examples, our zoning laws. The vast majority of people who support and vote for zoning laws undoubtedly think themselves to be staunch adherents to the concepts of free enterprise and private property, while actually their support is one of the most important tools in undermining these very principles.

Here is a man, Mr. Smith, living on a certain lot in a \$20,000 house. He then finds that Mr. Jones has purchased the vacant lot next door and intends to build a \$10,000 house on the property — or, worse, yet, aims to move in a trailer (or “mobile home”) in which to live. Smith becomes highly agitated; he fears that a far cheaper house next door will lower the market value of his own property, or perhaps he is esthetically repelled at

the sight of a mobile home. What, then, does he typically do in our gloriously free society? He goes to his local town council and has them pass an ordinance forbidding anyone to build a house worth less than \$20,000 on the property — in short, he has turned to that club of tyranny known as the zoning law. He has ruthlessly trampled on the freedom of enterprise and on the property right of his neighbor.

What else could Smith do, one might ask, to maintain the value of his property or the esthetic qualities of the lot next door? The answer is really quite simple. In a truly free society, he would buy the lot next door himself, or, as an alternative, pay Jones, if the latter is willing, the costs of putting up a more expensive dwelling. In short, in a truly free society, each man must pay for what he wants to achieve; he must not load the burden of getting what he wants on to the next man by use of the club and bayonet of organized government.