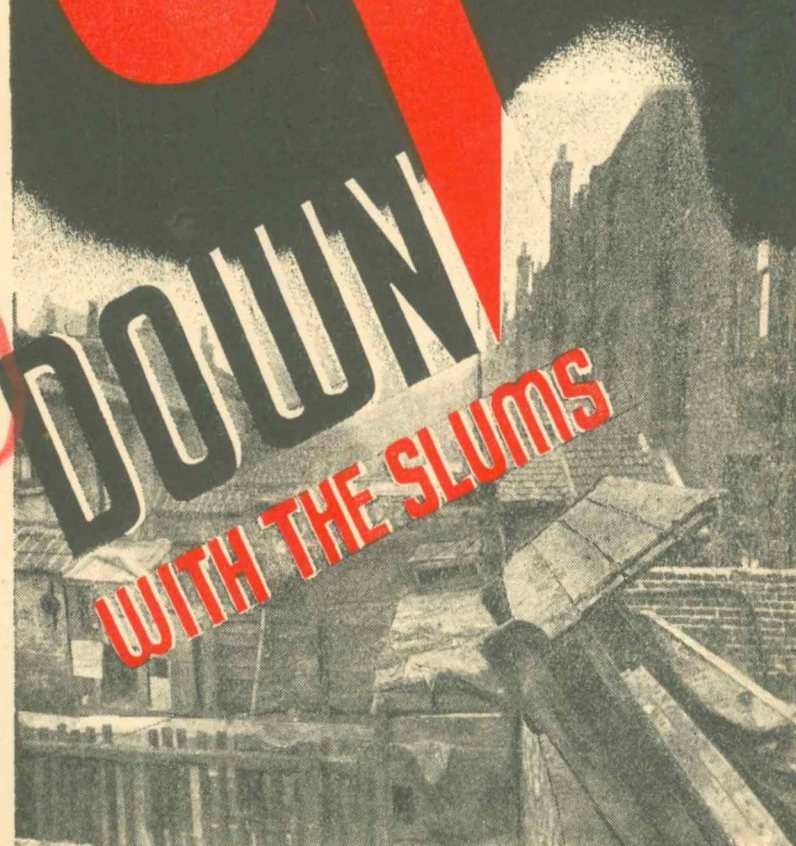


UP WITH THE HOUSES

1934

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DOWN WITH THE SLUMS



THE following Statement of Labour Party Housing Policy was adopted by the Annual Conference of the Party held at Southport in October, 1934.

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UP WITH THE HOUSES! DOWN WITH THE SLUMS!

THE facts of housing are beyond dispute.

They are revealed in the cold figures of the Census, in official reports of medical officers of health, in numerous social investigations, and in the actual experience of most of us.

In Great Britain, with its enormous productive resources, millions of men, women and children exist in conditions of grim, inescapable poverty. Ill-feeding, ill-housing and ill-health are their lot, in town and countryside alike; and people who cannot pay for proper food and shelter are denied the elementary rights of human living.

The raising of the standard of life will be effected in many ways, but none will have speedier results than the decent housing of the nation.

First, there are the slums—this “Cancer of Empire.” In many towns it is not a question of clearing small areas here and there, but of clearing and replanning whole districts.

Then there is gross overcrowding, not merely in slum dwellings, but in hundreds of thousands of houses which could be made fit for one family, but which are, in fact, occupied by two, three or even more; while everywhere there are houses too small for the single families they contain.

Over and above slums and overcrowding, there are literally millions of houses which are not yet slums, but which require considerable repair or renovation.

Speed is vital. A drastic and dramatic housing drive is imperative, and the whole work must be so schemed that it is in conformity with thorough-going town and country planning.

That is the policy of the Labour Party. How it can be carried out effectively is the subject of this report.

LABOUR'S OBJECTIVES

Labour's housing plan has for its primary objectives—

A self-contained house for every family of two or more persons, at a rent it can afford to pay.

The abolition of overcrowding.

The demolition of the slums and every unfit house.

The thorough repair of every house that can be made fit.

The large-scale replanning of built-up areas, with provision for open spaces, the strict control and planning of developing areas, and the preservation of the countryside.

No individual, no political party will deny the justice of these objectives. They involve an upheaval in our social economy far beyond anything hitherto.

THE KIND OF HOUSES NEEDED

Standards of Accommodation

First, we must lay down standards of accommodation. Inevitably, they are far beyond what prevails to-day or what is immediately possible with the vast majority of present houses. They are not unreasonable, and no family should have less.

But the fact must be faced that good general standards are impossible until an enormous number of new houses, at low rents, have been built to accommodate the families which will be displaced as the standards are applied.

In new houses we shall be able to carry out all or nearly all these standards. In existing houses we must proceed by way of by-law and otherwise, as proposed later, to secure the standards as far as possible.

Self-Contained House for Each Family

There must be a self-contained house for each family of two or more persons. By this is meant structurally-separate accommodation with its own front door, behind which the family can maintain a reasonable privacy. The house may, of course, be a detached or semi-detached cottage, or one of a row of houses, or a flat or maisonette.

The essence of the standard is that behind the front door is to be found all the amenities which are necessary to family life, reserved to the use of one family.

Minimum Number of Rooms for Each Family

The minimum room requirements are:

A living-room (in addition to kitchen or scullery), not slept in, for every family of two or more persons.

In new houses, a living room, not slept in, with scullery in addition, for every family of over two persons, together with a parlour in most cases.

Separate bedroom accommodation for males and females over ten years of age.

Minimum floor and air-space requirements in bedrooms.

Various standards are already in use for measuring overcrowding, notably the following. The so-called *Census standards* are over-two-persons-per-room in England and Wales and over-three-persons-per-room in Scotland, including kitchens and all other rooms except bathrooms, sculleries, etc. The *sex-separation standard* requires separate room sleeping accommodation for males and females over ten years of age, but with man and wife sharing a room. The standard used by Manchester Corporation is over-2½-persons-per-room-slept-in, children under ten counting as half; with, in addition, the sex-separation standard.

Although the Manchester standard is a big advance on the other two and shows about three times as much overcrowding as the Census standard for England and Wales, it is far from ideal, and ignores living-room accommodation.

Four other standards may be noted. The *Merseyside Social Survey*, counting persons under ten as half, allows one room for 2½ persons, two for 3 or 3½, three for 4 or 5, four for 5½ to 7½, and so on, with sex-separation over seven except for man and wife, and for families of four or more adults (or their equivalent) at least one living-room not used for sleeping. There are also certain minima in the arrangement of sleeping accommodation. The slum survey of the *Architects' Journal* (June 22, 1933) adopts a standard of over-1½-persons-per-room in an examination of the limited Census figures, and this probably gives results not very dissimilar to those of the Manchester standard. The official *Liverpool Standard* is 400 cubic feet of air per person, counting all rooms, with sex-separation over ten. The *Week-End Review* inquiry (December 16, 1933) takes as a basis 1½ persons per room, with sex-separation

over ten, as the "highest tolerable density"; but this has to be applied in conjunction with certain minima of structure, equipment, service and amenity.

It is a tragic commentary on 20th Century housing that the application of even the lowest of these standards reveals gross and widespread overcrowding.

Other Requirements

Among other reasonable requirements are the following:

A separate water-closet for each family, within the structurally-separate house.

A separate bathroom, structurally separate from the water-closet, with a wash-hand basin.

A good-sized pantry for storing food.

Facilities for cooking, washing clothes, drying clothes out of doors, storing coal and other fuel.

Hygienic temporary storage of refuse, separate for each house, and regular collection of refuse. Piped water supply, inside the house, with proper drainage.

A hot water supply to kitchen, bath and wash-hand basin, maintained in good order.

Electricity and/or gas, with "points" for heating purposes.

Standards of natural lighting and ventilation which entirely rule out cellar dwellings, back-to-back houses, houses closely crowded together, and dark or airless rooms—a sunlight standard.

Adequate windows, opening directly to the external air, in every room, kitchen or scullery, water-closet, bathroom or pantry.

Properly lighted and ventilated passages and staircases, with natural lighting as far as possible.

Every house entirely free from damp and vermin, and kept in proper sanitary condition and a good state of repair and decorative condition.

Houses We Must Build

So far as new houses are concerned, the greatest need is for the three-bedroom parlour house (the five-apartment house in Scotland) with decent-sized rooms. That means living-room, parlour, three bedrooms and scullery. Every family with boys and girls over ten must obviously have three bedrooms, at least.

It is an utterly mistaken policy to omit the parlour or cut down the size of rooms. We are not aiming barely to relieve housing destitution and no more. We are providing accommodation for living in, in which families will grow up—not cells, but houses in which people can move.

We are building for generations to come, for a time when the standard of living will be much higher. The new houses of to-day must not be the slums of to-morrow. A parlour, however used, is not an extravagance for a family. A little extra space in a room, above absolute minimum health requirements, is not a mere luxury—bedrooms, and not mere rooms for beds, are needed.

Various types of houses will be built, but this is what we must aim at providing in the normal two-storey cottage-type:

Every family house with a living-room, parlour, scullery ample for cooking, bathroom, separate water-closet, larder and storage accommodation—the great majority with three bedrooms, and some with more.

Three-bedroom house to have an area of not less than 850 superficial feet.

Density of houses not to exceed eight per acre in rural areas and twelve per acre elsewhere, and each to have a garden.

Every house attractively designed, soundly built throughout, conveniently planned with proper equipment and cupboards, supplied with water, light, power and a hot water system, and kept in good repair and decorative condition.

In rural areas it will not be possible in every case to provide right away all the services available in the towns. Much remains to be done, for example, before power and piped water supplies are developed on a sufficiently comprehensive scale. But any deficiency of this kind must be regarded as temporary only, while the particular service is being extended as rapidly as possible. The housing standards of the countryside must be as high as those of the towns.

In some cases where there is a demand for flats, as in London, there will be wide opportunity for experiment. Spacious layout, with gardens and playgrounds, are essential; barrack-like structures, outside stairs and outside water-closets or bathrooms, must be avoided at all costs; while arrangements must be made for the

proper cleaning and repair of common staircases and windows. Where smaller houses for aged persons are provided, as under the 1924 and 1930 Acts, care must be taken that they are used only for this purpose, and do not become overcrowded.

Planning of Houses and Schemes

Great importance is attached to the lay-out of schemes, and to the design and planning of the houses themselves, and their cheerful appearance. They must fit in with existing building, and, at the same time, avoid monotony. Not all local traditional styles are attractive; but the best of them should be kept in mind, and the introduction of incongruous forms or inharmonious colours avoided. As the *Ministry of Health Housing Manual* of 1927 declares:

“Economy affords no excuse for dumping down among a group of picturesque low village buildings a short section cut from a terrace of town houses. . . . If cost or any other reason should prevent the adoption of certain prevailing local roofing materials, such as stone slabs, green slates or thatch, that is no reason why the hardest of red tiles should be chosen to disfigure a Gloucestershire village, or the sickliest of salmon pink compo sheets be introduced as a discordant patch on a Welsh hill-side.”

This is no less true of the towns. We need pleasant houses of character, in great variety of design, but not out of place.

The lay-out of schemes must provide for the amenities necessary to civilised living—wide tree-lined streets, houses well set back, varied grouping of houses, quadrangle, etc., planning with greens, well-kept hedges and fences, and open spaces. Where necessary, provision must also be made for public gardens and playing fields, schools (including nursery schools), libraries, baths, hospitals and clinics, public halls, cinemas and other places of entertainment, and shops. To build houses alone is not enough. Amenity is, in many ways, as important as houseroom. If a special plea is made for the establishment of nursery schools in new housing schemes, it is because their extraordinary value is not yet generally recognised.

In London and some other densely-populated areas, it may be found desirable to develop self-contained units on garden city or satellite town lines, with their own industries. But we are strongly opposed to the building of huge dormitory cottage estates in out-lying districts. Experience of such estates in London has shown

serious disadvantages, such as heavy travelling expenses and excessive time spent in travelling, poor social facilities, dearth of local employment or an increasing dependence on one particular industry or even one factory, and a depressing uniformity. We strongly prefer small estates which fit in with existing building, and have the initial advantage of any social amenities already available.

Where a large estate is absolutely unavoidable, there should be strictly controlled mixed development, with suitably situated land available for office, factory and other buildings; and facilities should be provided for new factories and employment, and for shopping and marketing.

Town and Country Planning

We do not intend in this report to deal at length with town and country planning, which is a matter for separate consideration. But this must be said. In its widest aspect, there is an entire absence of planning of the country as a whole, as evidenced by the defacement of great areas by spasmodic and uncontrolled development of industries and towns and buildings, some of which are now being left semi-derelict while factories and houses are springing up haphazard in new districts.

At the same time, as regards town and country planning in the narrower sense, the existing machinery is inadequate; and at the present rate of deterioration, it will soon be difficult to find an unspoilt piece of country within reasonable reach of a fair-sized town, or to discover anywhere an escape from bungaloid monstrosities.

It is obvious that planning must be speedily applied to all land, whether built-up or not, having regard to regional and national considerations of amenity, transport, roads, water, power and other services, as well as the distribution of industry.

Whatever planning machinery is adopted, it must be such that for housing purposes we know as soon as possible where the houses are to be built to conform to proper planning.

It must also be such as to enable the housing authorities to deal with large areas, the aim being the replanning or development of whole districts rather than dealing merely with individual unfit houses or small groups of such houses. For

this purpose, the housing authorities must have power to acquire land on a large scale, whether it is needed for building or not, in order that they may exercise rigid control over any development which may takeplace.

There is one further point to be emphasised. The æsthetic devastation of town and countryside, in particular by disharmonious and ugly houses, petrol stations and advertisements, must be stopped at all costs. Fundamentally, we dislike any censorship of personal taste; but, in self-protection, the community must at least deal with the worst of the excrescences of design and colouring, and particularly of the latter. Matters can also be improved if the local authorities pay greater attention to the appearance of their own buildings, and their roads and streets, notably by the planting of trees, but even by seemingly small things like, for example, good lettering on street name signs.

THE NUMBER OF HOUSES NEEDED

No comprehensive analysis of slums and overcrowding is available; but we know that Leeds has some 75,000 back-to-back houses without through ventilation, that Birmingham has some 40,000, that in Liverpool and London many families occupy cellar-dwellings, that two out of three London families are compelled to share a house, that in London alone 500,000 people (one-eighth of the population) live more than two to a room including the kitchen, and that in Scotland 1,640,000 people (over one-third of the population) live more than two to a room. There is no end to the number of examples that could be quoted, in small towns as in large, in villages as in country towns.

It can be roughly estimated how many houses are needed to give each family self-contained accommodation, or to reduce overcrowding below a crude persons-per-room standard; but the application of the sex-separation standard, or of any of the more elaborate standards already mentioned, is largely speculative. Nor is it known how many houses, not yet slums, can be brought up to a decent condition.

The best that can be done is to give representative estimates, from which some general conclusions may be drawn as to the scale of the problem.

Ministry of Health Inquiry, 1919

A Ministry of Health inquiry in 1919, on a rather rough-and-ready basis through the local authorities, gave a shortage of 824,700 houses in England and Wales, comprising 507,700 to remedy overcrowding of existing houses and to meet the needs arising in the next three years, and 318,000 to replace unfit houses. A similar inquiry in Scotland gave a shortage of 131,000, and a fresh inquiry, in 1925, gave the figure as 118,000.

Wheatley Building Programme, 1924

Under the Wheatley Housing Act of 1924, the programme for Great Britain prepared in co-operation with the building industry provided for 2,500,000 new houses in fifteen years, of which 1,500,000 were to supply normal requirements of 100,000 per year, and 1,000,000 to make up accumulated arrears.

National Housing and Town-Planning Council, 1929

In its 1929 report, *A Policy for the Slums*, the representative Committee appointed by the National Housing and Town-Planning Council stated:

"The conclusion we arrive at is that, on the basis of $1\frac{1}{2}$ persons per room, a quarter of the population of England and Wales is living in overcrowded conditions."

"Taking into account the replacement of unfit houses as well as the abatement of overcrowding, it is a conservative estimate that well over a million new houses are immediately needed for these purposes alone."

"It is estimated that during the next ten years $1\frac{1}{2}$ million working-class houses should be built in England and Wales, of which 1 million should be let at a weekly rental of about 11/- gross (*i.e.*, including rates) and $\frac{1}{2}$ million at about 7/6 gross."

Scottish Housing Committee, 1933

The Scottish Departmental Housing Committee—the Whitson Committee—appointed in 1933 to consider reconditioning, states that there are 1,146,852 houses in Scotland, of which 121,922 are of six rooms or more, 156,257 are post-War subsidy houses, and 13,000 are houses reconditioned under the 1926 Housing (Rural Workers) Act. Of the remaining 855,673, it estimates that about one-twentieth (say 41,000) are "uninhabitable and ripe for demolition." In support of this figure, the Committee states:

"At the present moment, 13,000, or about one-twentieth of the 256,000 houses in Glasgow are deemed to be uninhabitable; and further, according to the estimates submitted to the Department of Health in

1930, upon which local authorities' three year housing programmes were based, 40,073 out of a total of 1,057,609 houses were estimated to be required to replace unfit houses."

The Committee adds, that in addition to the 41,000 uninhabitable houses, of the others "many for structural and environment reasons and also on economic grounds may not be suitable for improvement, while many more doubtless possess a proper standard of fitness"; and goes on to suggest that no less than 200,000 houses with a million inhabitants, or a fifth of all houses in Scotland, require improvement and "can be made to reach an improved standard without uneconomic expenditure."

Architects' Journal Inquiry, 1933

The inquiry undertaken on behalf of the *Architects' Journal* (June 22 and October 26, 1933) regards persons over $1\frac{1}{2}$ to a room as overcrowded, and applies this standard to the 1931 Census figures and such other information as is available, for the purpose of measuring present needs in London and fourteen provincial cities.

	Popula- tion	Persons per Room		Rooms Required Merely to Abate Over- crowding at over $1\frac{1}{2}$ Persons per Room*	Houses Required to Abolish Over- crowding at over $1\frac{1}{2}$ Persons per Room, and to Replace Unfit Houses*†
		Over 3	Over $1\frac{1}{2}$ *		
Liverpool ..	855,688	20,515	215,965	50,000	50,000
Leeds ..	482,809	7,498	97,507	22,000	70,000
Manchester ..	766,378	8,864	138,162	30,000	30,000
Birmingham ..	1,002,603	11,455	180,746	37,500	50,000
Sheffield ..	511,757	7,679	106,314	22,500	27,000
Glasgow ..	1,088,461	199,614	445,819	90,000	55,000
Stoke ..	276,639	5,323	80,807	18,000	12,500
Bristol ..	397,012	3,681	58,955	12,000	6,000
Hull ..	313,544	4,992	65,151	13,750	6,000
Cardiff ..	223,589	1,737	36,785	8,500	5,000
Newcastle ..	283,156	25,876	110,423	32,000	13,000
Bradford ..	298,041	3,526	57,015	12,000	15,000
Edinburgh ..	439,010	43,893	116,734	22,500	13,000
Dundee ..	175,565	22,438	60,288	12,000	12,000
Total for Four- teen Cities	7,114,272	367,091	1,770,671	382,750	364,500†
London ..	4,397,003	150,130	1,206,894	287,000	165,750
Total for Fif- teen Cities	11,511,275	517,221	2,977,565	669,750	530,000†

* Overcrowding at over 2 per room in the case of Scottish cities.

† If overcrowding at over $1\frac{1}{2}$ persons per room is adopted as the standard for Scotland, the housing needs of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee are increased to 85,000, 23,000 and 20,000, respectively, which would raise the total housing needs of the fourteen cities to 412,500, and of the fifteen cities to 578,000.

As far as the fourteen provincial cities are concerned, it is found that of well over 7 million people, one in twenty are living over 3 to a room; while practically one in four are living over 1½ to a room in England and Wales or over 2 to a room in Scotland.

The inquiry concludes that "assuming that housing conditions in the other parts of the country (ranging from cities of about 250,000 to the smallest rural areas) are half as bad as in the cities investigated, which seems justifiable so far as can be judged, the total housing needs of Britain amount to 1,400,000 houses."

Estimates by B. Seebohm Rowntree

In the *Contemporary Review* of October, 1933, Mr. B. Seebohm Rowntree, the well-known Liberal, states:

"Taking all kinds of houses into consideration, and assuming a standard of one structurally-separate dwelling for every family, there was, in 1931, a shortage of 830,000 dwellings in England and Wales. This compares with a shortage of 710,000 houses in 1921, and 250,000 in 1911. In view of the fact that nearly 2 million houses have been built since the Armistice, these figures may seem astonishing, but the increasing shortage is mainly due to the decreasing size of families. In 1931, there were 48 more families per thousand of the population than in 1911.

"The above figures take no account of overcrowding or insanitary dwellings. If these are included, it is a conservative estimate that 1½ million houses are needed to-day, if every family is to have a structurally-separate and sanitary dwelling. Even when these have been built, there will remain hundreds of thousands of houses with only two bedrooms, where proper separation of the sexes is impossible.

"Such facts as are available point to the conclusion that the shortage of houses for rural workers amounts to between 75,000 and 100,000."

Estimates by Sir E. D. Simon

In his book, *The Anti-Slum Campaign* (1933), Sir E. D. Simon, the well-known housing authority and Liberal ex-Mayor of Manchester, reaches the following conclusions:

"We have shown that to meet the existing shortage of houses and the prospective increase in families, nearly 2 million additional houses will be needed by 1951. We have shown that about 4 million houses to-day are below any acceptable standard.

"To house the population of England and Wales in good houses means, therefore, building 6 million new houses (between 1931 and 1951): a task offering steady employment for the building trade for thirty years at the present rate of building 200,000 houses each year."

It is worth while examining these estimates, which are based on the 1931 Census figures and other information:

(a) On the standard of structurally-separate accommodation for each family, the aim should be to reach a number of houses in each city and area which very nearly approaches the number of recorded families, a small allowance being made for lodgers who do not require separate accommodation. On this basis the 1931 shortage was 830,000, of which over half (592,400) was in the Greater London region.

(b) Assuming that the increase in the number of families during 1932-41 is half, and during 1942-51 one-eighth, of the increase recorded during 1922-31, *i.e.*, 750,100 and 190,000, respectively, a further 940,000 houses will be needed during the twenty years 1931-51 to allow structurally-separate accommodation for the additional families, of which over a quarter are in the Greater London region.

(c) As regards houses that should be replaced, it is estimated that there may be 10,000 slums of the worst type, corresponding to the Welsh cellar dwellings, 100,000 if back-to-back houses and really bad houses in courts are included, 1,000,000 unfit houses on the basis of Manchester condemned houses, and altogether probably some 4,000,000 houses far below the modern standard and "all of which must be replaced by much better houses before we shall be within sight of our goal."

Conclusion on Housing Needs

The reader can take his choice.

It is clear, however, that if the standards already described in this report were applied to existing houses, the result would show needs on the scale of the estimates of Sir E. D. Simon. The full results of the 1931 Census are not yet available, but it would appear that to give every family in Great Britain a self-contained dwelling would alone require a million new houses.

The estimate of a million existing houses in England and Wales unfit on the standard of Manchester condemned houses cannot be far out, and there must be another 250,000 such houses in Scotland; while the total of 4,000,000 houses (including those above) far below the modern standard, which Sir E. D. Simon would replace in England and Wales, cannot be less than the requirements of our own standard, with probably another 500,000 (including those above) in Scotland. And if the estimate of increase in the number of families is accepted, a further 900,000

new houses will be needed in Great Britain during the next twenty years.

Thus we are faced with an immediate need of no fewer than 2½ million new houses in Great Britain, to give each family structurally-separate accommodation, to replace the worst of the existing houses, and to abolish the worst features of overcrowding.

While during the next twenty years, if we are to house the nation in accordance with the modern standards we contemplate, anything between five and six million new houses may be needed altogether.

To the criticism that these figures are arbitrary and speculative, we would reply emphatically that they are accurate in this sense—that if we can build houses at the unprecedented rate of 250,000–300,000 per year, it will take some fifteen to twenty years before we can begin to be satisfied with the housing of the people.

WHO WILL BUILD THE HOUSES?

If the measure of its success is the present housing of the nation, then indeed does private enterprise stand condemned.

There is nothing new in the housing scandal. Private enterprise before the war failed to provide decent accommodation for the mass of the people, and even the advocates of *laissez faire* were compelled to give the local authorities considerable housing powers which, however, were comparatively little used.

Post-War Building

After the War, it was so obvious that private enterprise could not tackle the job, that a whole series of Housing Acts have been passed—notably the Addison Acts of 1919, the Chamberlain Act of 1923, the Wheatley Act of 1924, and the Greenwood Act of 1930. The essential features of this mass of legislation have been that the local authorities have become the primary agents for providing ordinary working-class accommodation, and that building subsidies have been given by the Exchequer and the local authorities.

As a result, between 1919 and March 31, 1934, some 1,178,000 subsidy houses have been built in England and Wales, 756,000 by the local authorities and 422,000 by subsidised private enterprise. In Scotland, some 165,000 houses have been built, 128,000

by the public authorities and 37,000 by subsidised private enterprise. Relatively this is a substantial achievement, but it has proved entirely insufficient.

Not more than three-quarters of these houses are available for letting, and even then the rents of the great majority are above what the average worker can afford to pay. A fair number are occupied by persons who do not ordinarily come within the "working-class" economic category, and the majority are occupied only by the better-paid workers, or by workers who have to pay more rent than they can afford. It is entirely proper that the better-paid worker should be provided for; but it is beyond dispute that the lower-paid worker has been very largely neglected.

Private enterprise has also built since the War, without subsidy, 1,140,000 houses in England and Wales, of which three-quarters are not above £26 rateable value (£35 in London); but the great majority have been for sale to persons other than working-class. For Scotland the corresponding figure is about 27,000. The total of 2,500,000 post-war houses appears formidable, averaging some 160,000 per year, but, in fact, it is not much above the rate of building twenty years earlier; for during 1901-06, the increase in all dwellings ranged from 122,000 to 145,000 per year.

Looking at the position another way, there are, in Great Britain, some 6,000,000 pre-War and some 1,000,000 post-War houses rented by working-class families. This relatively small post-War increase of 17 per cent. must be considered in relation to the increase in working-class population and in the number of separate working-class families; and it is safe to conclude that little surplus has been provided for overtaking the arrears in this class of house. On the other hand, there is no shortage of the expensive type of house, and the demand for the less expensive middle-class house is being met with fair rapidity.

It might have been thought that with the post-War building of houses for sale there would have been a considerable process of filtering-up, those who could afford it moving to the new houses and so relieving the pressure on the lower-rented accommodation. Actually, there has been very little such movement, owing partly to the general shortage of houses, partly to inability to pay higher rents, and partly to the system of decontrol under the Rent

Restrictions Acts. There is an overwhelming case for the maintenance of the control of rents; but the decontrol provisions of the 1923 Act have meant that a tenant, if he moved, would lose his security of tenure and normally have to pay a higher rent. Seven-eighths of the tenants of controlled houses have, in fact, not moved.

In any case, whatever the exact degree of improvement effected by post-War building, housing on an entirely different scale is needed. The Wheatley Scheme of 1924 had imagination—it envisaged a continuous and determined building programme over fifteen years—and together with Labour's 1930 Slum-Clearing Act, provided a substantial basis for the development of a great housing drive.

“National” Government Smashes Comprehensive Plan

It is nothing less than grim tragedy that the present “National” Government has for the time being smashed all hope of any such comprehensive advance. For the first time since the War, the way was clear for big-scale action—the 1924 Act for ordinary new houses, the 1931 Act for rural cottages, and the 1930 Act for slum-clearing and rehousing, were on the statute book; Exchequer assistance was available; the building industry was big enough for the job; costs were comparatively low; and the local authorities were preparing long-term schemes.

The “National” Government made short work of these plans.

It has abolished the Wheatley Exchequer subsidy in England and Wales, and drastically reduced it in Scotland—just when building costs were approaching a level which enabled houses to be let at fairly low rents—and has cut the rural cottages scheme from 40,000 to 2,000. It has repeatedly proclaimed its reliance on private enterprise to meet the demand for ordinary new houses (as distinct from slum rehousing), and has pinned its faith to a scheme by which the Exchequer shares any loss incurred by local authorities in guaranteeing the above-normal part of any advances, made by building societies, for houses built or acquired for letting to working-class tenants.

But private enterprise is not providing working-class houses to let. A mere handful are being built under the guarantee scheme; and the Government has even found itself compelled, much against its intention, to sanction schemes for a few non-subsidy houses to be built by some of the local authorities themselves.

The programmes for ordinary new houses which the Labour Government asked for have been ruthlessly scrapped, and nothing yet has taken their place. That is the most damning aspect of "National" Government policy.

For the abolition of overcrowding, the provision of structurally-separate accommodation for each family, and the supply of fit houses with decent facilities, are dependent on the building of ordinary new houses.

Slum-clearing and rehousing is vital, but it concerns only one part of the housing problem and by itself cannot solve that problem. Indeed, the abolition of the slums themselves depends on an abundant supply of ordinary new houses ; for nothing more inevitably creates slums than the gross overcrowding and lack of facilities which exist to-day in so many houses which have not yet been technically classified as slums.

But even the "National" Government could not undo all the fine work of its predecessor, and mercifully it has been compelled by an overwhelming public opinion to maintain the 1930 Slum-Clearing Act in operation. That compulsion, and not inclination, has been the decisive factor, is quite clear. As recently as December 15, 1932, the Minister of Health, Sir Hilton Young, was announcing in the House of Commons: "I have come to the conclusion that the maximum which is practicable is a maximum of 12,000 (slum) houses a year to clear. Let the House observe that I state that as a maximum to which we should work." That comparatively trifling figure means over forty years to wipe out the half million worst houses alone!

Bombarded by protests from all quarters, the Government has since been compelled to take a more energetic line, and the local authorities have submitted schemes for clearing some 268,000 unfit houses in England and Wales during the five years 1934-38, and for building some 286,000 houses in replacement, an average of 57,000 per year. This is an appreciable improvement on 12,000 per year, *if it is carried out*, but, unfortunately, there is no guarantee of this whatever. Past experience of Conservative Governments and Conservative local authorities does not raise great hopes, and it is not unreasonable to fear that the first compulsory enthusiasm may be short-lived, as has so often happened before.

It is clear, moreover, that these improved programmes are inadequate. In the words of the Ministry of Health, they are intended "to secure the demolition of *all* slum houses," and have been accepted as such by the Minister of Health. But it cannot be

seriously maintained that there are only 268,000 slum houses in England and Wales, and the published list of local schemes itself gives proof of this. While Leeds, for example, proposes to demolish 30,000 houses in five years, the figure for the whole of London, as submitted by the late Conservative Council, is only 33,000. Birmingham has 40,000 back-to-back houses alone, yet it proposes to demolish only 4,500 houses.

In Scotland, according to five-year programmes submitted by 208 out of 228 housing authorities, it is officially estimated that 59,774 houses are required to replace unfit houses, and that 42,948 new houses, or 72 per cent. of the estimated requirements, will be erected for this purpose.

Private Enterprise Impotent

The housing policy of the "National" Government stands condemned. Vacillation, and a lack of real understanding of the problem, have been its chief characteristics. Precious years have been wasted, and such action as has been taken has been forced by public opinion. The "National" Government may bow once more to the storm of protest and do something about overcrowding, but housing in tenements is the wrong method, apart from exceptional cases.

The root of the problem is the building of ordinary new houses at low rents, and that the "National" Government has never realised.

To build on the scale required, is quite beyond the capacity of private enterprise. The opportunity is there now, but the results are negligible. Not merely is speculative building essentially haphazard, not merely is it often characterised by inferior construction and lack of planning; but even at present relatively low building costs, it cannot build decent houses at the low rents necessary to meet the greatest need, even if there was no margin of profit whatever. It cannot tackle slum-clearing. And where building is not profitable, no houses are provided.

In any case, the continuous programme envisaged in this report is far too big for haphazard speculative building. To achieve success, it demands a nation-wide organisation, with a central direction which can plan and co-ordinate local housing programmes, labour supply and the production and distribution of materials, and which can control costs.

Only the public authorities can do the job in the way it must be done—comprehensively, speedily and efficiently.

LABOUR'S HOUSING PLAN

PARLIAMENT to lay down the general lines of housing policy and finance, as heretofore.

MINISTER OF HEALTH responsible for the size and speed of the national housing programme and the constituent local programmes, and having concurrent powers to undertake local programmes where local authorities are unable or unwilling to carry them out.

NATIONAL HOUSING COMMISSION responsible for administration, and for arranging and ensuring that the programmes are carried out; and, subject to the final responsibility of the Minister, the authority for drawing up the programmes in the first instance, in conjunction with the local authorities.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES to undertake the local programmes if they can and so desire; otherwise the work to be directly undertaken by the Commission exercising concurrent powers on the authority and on behalf of the Minister.

The responsible Minister in *Scotland* will be the Secretary of State; but it is a matter for consideration at the time how far there should be a separate administrative organisation for *Scotland* on the lines laid down here.

HOW THE PLAN WILL WORK

(1) Local housing authorities will be required to submit forthwith to the National Housing Commission an estimate, based on such information as is already available, of their slum-clearing and new building needs, and to state what work they have in hand and what they are prepared to undertake. The Commission will consider the replies in relation to the projected national programme, and make any necessary adjustments, in co-operation with the authorities concerned.

(2) While these provisional programmes are under weigh, a survey of housing requirements will be made in each area, regard being had to the needs of the county or other appropriate region as a whole. In many cases, the survey will be undertaken primarily by

the local authorities. In some cases it may best be done by an officer of the Commission in co-operation with the authority. In either instance the survey standards must be laid down by the Commission. The provisional programmes will then be adjusted by the Commission, in co-operation with the authorities, in the light of the survey results. All local programmes, provisional or otherwise, will be subject to confirmation by the Minister of Health.

(3) Local authorities willing to carry out the confirmed local programmes can do so, provided they have the staff competent to do the work, that proper standards are maintained, and that a suitable time schedule is observed.

(4) Where a local authority is unable or unwilling to undertake the local programme, or fails to carry it out satisfactorily, the Minister will have concurrent powers to act instead. For this purpose he will be endowed by statute with all the housing powers of local authorities, and will be able to exercise them in any particular case without having to default the authority under the existing cumbrous procedure. The decision as to where and when concurrent powers are to be exercised will rest with the Minister, but he will exercise them through the Commission acting on his behalf. No local authority should be permitted to gain financially simply as a result of the Commission having to act in its stead.

(5) Subject to the foregoing, the Commission will be responsible for administration, and for arranging and ensuring that the programmes are carried out satisfactorily.

National Housing Commission

The National Housing Commission will consist of a convenient number of members appointed by the Minister of Health, on grounds of suitability for the work. They will not be specifically representative of any particular interests, except that they will include persons cognisant with local government and with labour in the building industry. They will be appointed for a period of years and be eligible for re-appointment, but will be removable at any time for incapacity or misbehaviour.

The Commission will have its own staff, which will suitably include officers of the Ministry of Health seconded for service with the Commission, as well as members from outside the Civil Service. There will, of course, be close co-operation with appro-

priate sections of the Minist. Departments concerned, and with the various building industry. But it is not intended to set up an elaborate system of national or regional committees.

The most suitable administrative areas can only be determined at the time; but to avoid undue centralisation, it will probably be convenient to appoint regional officers with delegated responsibility on defined matters. Speed of decision and action and the avoidance of "red tape" are essential.

Where the local authorities undertake the programmes, there must be no unnecessary central interference. So long as a programme is carried out within the agreed prices, with suitable speed and with a satisfactory standard of construction, the authority should be free to adopt whatever arrangements it thinks best; and only in doubtful cases should there be need for anything more than a general contact with the progress of the work. On the other hand, many of the authorities will have had little experience on any serious scale, and will require technical and other assistance, which should be freely given. In all cases competent architects should be employed.

Where the Commission is made directly responsible for a local programme, it must be a matter of convenience how the work is carried out. But full use should be made of the Office of Works suitably organised for the purpose, as the building agency of the Commission. This will avoid the creation of new machinery, and secure the advantages of large-scale buying of materials.

National Programme

The shortage of houses is so great, that for many years to come the only limit to building must be the capacity of the building industry. The housing fluctuations of the post-war years, however, have caused great uncertainty and hardship to the personnel of the industry, and regard must be had to the size of the industry in relation to continuity of building and employment.

Even with a revival in general building, the industry will have a much greater capacity for housing than when the Wheatley Scheme was prepared. It has increased in numbers, and methods of construction have been developed, so that it should be possible to maintain, apart from private building, a national programme for Great Britain averaging 250,000-300,000 new houses per year, of which some 40,000 should be for Scotland.

This is a much higher figure for continuous public building than ever before, but nothing less can be considered. If there is any difficulty about labour supply or materials, the national programme must have precedence over other building.

Building Trade Operatives

It is imperative that there be close co-operation between the Commission and the operatives in the building trades, and that this should be specifically provided for by statute. It is not merely good business for the Commission to have full and frank discussion of the programmes and their operation, in order to get the best results and avoid potential difficulties; but the operatives themselves, who are usually first to suffer when difficulties arise, have a right to full knowledge and discussion, and to have their own views receive proper consideration.

Thus, for example, important problems of labour supply may be avoided by consultation at the earliest stages, when the national and local programmes are under discussion, and continuous consultation is necessary to deal with difficulties which may arise when the programmes are in hand.

It is not suggested that the Commission should deal specifically with wages and other working conditions—the building trades have their own machinery for that purpose. But it is important that, as a minimum, trade union conditions should be observed in every scheme connected with the programmes, and that they be observed in the spirit as well as in the letter. Neither rate-cutting nor other abuse must be tolerated for a moment, and it may be that some special form of "fair-conditions clause" will be required. The Commission must not only ensure that facilities are given to the trade unions to ascertain that proper conditions are observed in every scheme, but itself must take sufficient steps to make certain that they are observed.

Building Materials and Costs

Nothing has been more effective as an excuse for scrapping subsidies and slowing down building operations than a rise in building costs. To build on the scale contemplated, and leave prices to take care of themselves, would be suicidal to the national programme. We simply cannot afford profiteering where the housing of the people is concerned—or anywhere else, for that matter—and one of the most important functions of the Commission, vital to its success, is to keep prices as low as possible.

If by agreement with the trades concerned it is possible to ensure satisfactory supplies of materials and fittings at minimum prices, and to limit contract prices, a difficult problem will have been solved. The Minister must in any case be given statutory powers to deal with supplies and prices. Such powers, in reserve but exercisable through the Commission whenever the need arises, are indispensable.

It will probably be found convenient, in the first place, for the Commission to proceed somewhat on the lines of the Wheatley Scheme and consult representatives of the building industry, including operatives and employers, on the general aspects of the national programme; and it should be possible to negotiate for a sufficient supply of materials at standard prices.

Already there has been a big development in standardisation of materials, and further economies can be effected in this direction. On the other hand, there must be a fairly wide range of materials, for the object is not to build uniform houses throughout the country. Prices will be revised from time to time, but there will not necessarily be uniformity even in the cost of materials used in all localities. It is contemplated that producers will be invited to supply materials at the prices so fixed, leaving the housing authorities and contractors freedom as to their sources of supply, subject to such control as may be necessary to obtain a proper distribution of materials throughout the country; but it may be found cheaper for the Commission to act as a common supplier of materials to the authorities.

With a detailed knowledge of production costs, the Commission will be in a position to prevent profiteering in the production of materials and in the erection of houses. Especially where building is by ordinary contract, it will be necessary to maintain a keen supervision of materials and building standards.

The powers of the Minister, exercisable through the Commission, should enable it (a) to obtain, supply or manufacture all materials or parts required, either by contract, direct purchase or by taking over works as controlled establishments, or by itself setting up or acquiring and running establishments of its own; (b) to requisition supplies or stocks at fair prices, this to cover storage and transport; (c) to fix standard prices; and (d) to carry out the investigation and inspection necessary for the satisfactory exercise of these powers. The powers, it will be noted, are

sufficiently wide to enable the whole or any part of the building industry to be brought under public ownership and control, if that is found necessary in the public interest.

Management and Maintenance

There will be unified management and maintenance of both existing and new local authority houses, by the local authorities responsible for the local programmes. This is essential to the consolidation of subsidies and conditions proposed later. Where the Commission builds, it will either assume responsibility itself or delegate to appropriate local authorities.

The work is of prime importance. Not only must the Commission give assistance as required, but it must be able to exercise, on the authority and on behalf of the Minister, concurrent powers in order to secure satisfactory standards.

Standards vary considerably; but some authorities have shown how the best results may be obtained by the employment of specially-trained staffs for collecting rents, looking after the property, and maintaining sympathetic contact with tenants.

It is of little use, however, having trained personnel if their reports are not acted upon. Repairs must be carried out immediately they are required. There must be no hesitation in undertaking reasonable improvements. Tenants' difficulties and complaints must receive prompt attention. On the other hand, it is reasonable to insist on the regular payment of rent to the best of the tenants' ability, and on proper care of houses and gardens.

Subject to proper safeguards, the selection of tenants, exchange of tenancies, ordering of repairs and other such matters should be dealt with impartially by responsible officers of the local housing departments.

Case for this Organisation

The proposed combination of Minister, Commission and local authorities is likely to be far more successful than the existing arrangement or any form of housing board independent of the Minister and the local authorities. Housing cannot be "taken out of politics"; it is essentially a Government responsibility, the more so where subsidies are required; and any organisation which simply sweeps aside the local authorities is foredoomed at least to comparative failure. Whatever their sins of omission, a fair

number of authorities have housing officers and departments of considerable experience, which it would be foolish to ignore—to say nothing of the local resentment and obstruction which might develop. Let public utility bodies and private enterprise build if they wish, but they are no effective substitute for the public authorities.

To leave the initiative and responsibility, as at present, largely to some 1,900 local authorities in Great Britain is not satisfactory. While requirements to submit schemes to the Minister of Health or the Secretary of State for Scotland have had results, the vast majority of authorities have done very much less than they ought and could.

What is required is a programme drawn up on a national basis, having regard to local needs, and a means of ensuring that reasonable standards and rates of building will be maintained throughout the country as a whole.

The case for a Commission with defined administrative powers, is that it is more likely than the housing section of a Government Department to focus attention on its specific task. It is not possible to guarantee continuity of policy irrespective of the Government in office. But what can be done is to educate the country on the nature and necessity of the programme to such a degree that it becomes difficult for an anti-Labour Government to upset it; and it must be a primary function of the Commission to give a lead by widespread publicity on the basis of real social necessity for decent conditions of living.

Moreover, the fact that the Commission is a permanent body, the members of which are appointed for a period of years (which need not be the same in each case) and charged with carrying out an agreed programme of work, means that a change of Government does not in itself involve a change of Commission; and it is more difficult for an incoming Government to interfere with a semi-independent Commission than with an ordinary Government Department.

We envisage the Commission as the higher command of a great housing crusade, wholly devoted to its single task of smashing the housing evil.

UNFIT HOUSES, BY-LAWS AND RECONDITIONING

A landlord has no more right to sell bad accommodation than has a butcher to sell bad meat. Local authorities must have ample powers to deal with unfit houses, to ensure that all houses are of a suitable standard, and to prevent the overcrowding or other misuse of fit houses. The powers must be applied as a statutory duty, under the supervision of the Commission, and the Minister's concurrent powers will be exercisable by the Commission on his authority and behalf.

In the first place, we envisage a development of the clearance and improvement area methods of the 1930 Act. The aim must be the replanning of a district rather than merely the demolition of particular unfit houses or groups of unfit houses within it, and it may often be convenient and financially profitable for the local authority to acquire the whole or the greater part of the area to be replanned, especially where appreciable improvement values are likely to accrue.

Secondly, with the provision of new houses on a large scale, the local authorities will be able rigidly to enforce the statutory requirements that all unfit houses should be demolished or closed or made fit by the owners, or by the authorities themselves acting in default.

Thirdly, the standards of existing accommodation and new private building can be definitely raised by means of by-laws dealing with structural and sanitary condition, decorative and other repair, structurally-separate accommodation, overcrowding, water and power supplies, and so on.

(a) All new privately-built houses should be subject to stringent by-laws, which include all the conditions observed in local authority schemes, covering planning, construction, use and maintenance.

(b) Increasingly stringent by-laws on the lines indicated should be applied to all existing houses, but this depends considerably on a sufficient supply of new houses. Thus suddenly and rigidly to apply reasonable by-laws against overcrowding, or enforcing structurally-separate accommodation for each family, would at the present time mean turning out hundreds of thousands of families into the streets without any shelter whatever.

(c) In order to prevent further overcrowding and the creation of new slums, there should be no increase in the number of families now occupying any house without a licence from the local authority and the observance of suitable conditions imposed by special by-laws. This would be additional to other by-laws.

The enforcement of by-laws on the lines indicated involves, however, a big improvement in the present methods of inspection, and an increase everywhere in appropriate staffs. The local authorities must take the initiative, by regular inspection and prompt attention to complaints; and we suggest, as a further safeguard, that the Medical Officer of Health should be obliged to examine and report on any house in respect of which any four local government electors have lodged a complaint as to its unfitness.

Fourthly, when stringent by-laws are being enforced, we come up against the problem of reconditioning.

Let it be said right away that reconditioning is neither a cure for the slum problem nor an alleviation. The only way to deal with slums is to tear them down.

But there will be some millions of houses which do not come within a wide definition of unfitness, and many of these can be greatly improved by structural alteration, conversion or some other form of reconditioning—over and above what an owner may fairly be compelled to do by by-law. It is at this point—the point beyond which stringent by-laws cease to extend—and not below it, where the housing authorities must sooner or later step in and bring suitable decently-built houses up to a really satisfactory standard, on the basis of prior compulsory acquisition.

Our attitude must not be misunderstood. Experience of reconditioning hitherto has been small and financially none too happy, and there has been a definite tendency to deal with houses in unduly bad condition and situation. For the present, we go no farther than this—that in the light of reconditioning experience in improvement areas under the 1930 Act, and otherwise, the Commission should proceed by way of experiment in selected areas.

It will be appreciated that we are entirely opposed to many of the proposals contained in the Moyne and Whitson Reports. In particular, we are against burdening the local authorities with any reconditioning of unfit houses which is the statutory duty of owners under appropriate by-laws; against the establishment of

any *ad hoc* public corporation to undertake such duties; and, under our general scheme, against any form of financial assistance to owners for repairing or reconditioning, other than possible loan facilities on a strictly economic basis. At the same time, in order to enforce reconditioning local authorities must have power to acquire at site value unfit property which the owner, after due warning, fails to recondition.

Procedure and Compensation

It is not here intended to examine the details of procedure in the acquisition of land and buildings for housing purposes, in slum-clearing, or in the enforcement of by-laws. Procedure is now excessively complicated and slow, and must be simplified and speeded up.

For compensation purposes, the Acquisition of Land Act, 1919, with various sections of the Housing Acts, substantially provide a suitable means for ascertaining the value; but consideration must be given *inter alia* to the exclusion of any element of value (and not merely "special adaptation") arising only from the requirements of a public authority. Similarly, the recovery of values accruing to private property because of public authority housing activities, must be examined as part of the general problem of betterment. The aim will be to recover such values, but the best methods must be the subject of separate inquiry. The actual compensation payable will be determined in accordance with the principles adopted by the Labour Party, which govern generally compensation for property which is socialised.*

RENTS AND FINANCE

We have approached the housing problem in the only rational manner—from the point of view of housing needs and their satisfaction, as distinct from rents and costs.

The essence of the financial situation is that, under existing economic conditions, the average worker cannot afford the economic rent of the house to which he and his family are socially entitled. The 1929 Committee of the National Housing and Town Planning Council demanded a million houses in England and Wales at about 11s., including rates, and half-a-million at about 7s. 6d. Sir E. D. Simon, in *The Anti-Slum Campaign*, wants half

* See *Public Ownership and Compensation*, which is contained in the Report of Annual Conference, 1934.

the new local authority houses to be let at a rent, including rates, not exceeding 12s., and the other half at from 5s. to 10s. and averaging about 7s.

To anyone acquainted with the realities of prevailing low wages, there can be no question of the desperate need for a very large number of houses at rents (including rates) ranging from 5s. to 10s.

At present costs, this cannot be done without financial assistance. In England and Wales, even with borrowing for 60 years at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., the rent (excluding rates) necessary to meet all the charges on a £350 house is 7s. 11d. per week, made up of 5s. 5d. for interest and sinking fund and a flat-rate 2s. 6d. for maintenance; while a £400 house necessitates a rent of 8s. 8d. At 4 per cent. the rents are 8s. 5d. and 9s. 4d., respectively, and at 5 per cent. 9s. 7d. and 10s. 8d. In Scotland, allowing £5 10s. per year for maintenance, owners' rates at 5s. per £ of rental, and with borrowing at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. over 60 years, the rent (excluding occupiers' rates) of a £350 house is £25 19s. 9d. per year (10s. per week) and of a £400 house £28 13s. 1d. (11s. per week). At 4 per cent. the rents are £27 18s. 4d. (10s. 9d. per week) and £30 17s. 1d. (11s. 10d. per week), respectively.

To these rents must be added an amount for rates, which in England and Wales (outside London) often range between 2s. 6d. and 5s. per week, and in Scotland, as regards occupiers' rates, often range between 2s. and 3s. 6d. per week.

These figures are used only for illustrative purposes, to show how necessary financial assistance is.

Housing costs and local rates vary greatly; and in some districts, particularly in and around London, rents (including rates) are much higher than elsewhere. Where flats are inevitable, as in Central London, the costs and rents are even greater.

It is not possible to state in advance exactly what financial assistance will be necessary—that depends on all-in costs, rates of borrowing and local rates; but the primary aim must be to let the majority of the houses at rents (including rates) ranging from 5s. to 10s. per week in most parts of the country, and a subsidy sufficient to achieve this must be provided. At the present time, the former Wheatley subsidies would enable this to be done in most areas.

On the other hand, as Labour's housing policy envisages a great extension of municipal ownership, the existing restrictions on the

class of houses which local authorities may build should not be re-enacted.

Since, in the early stages at least, it is unlikely that any appreciable part of capital costs can be met from revenue, it is vitally important to raise capital as cheaply as possible. A difference of 1 per cent. in the rate of interest may mean a difference of a shilling or more in the weekly rent.

Capital for housing must be considered in relation to capital for national development generally, which is a matter for separate examination as part of national financial policy. So far as loans are concerned, all local authorities should equally be given the advantages of Government borrowing and full facilities for conversion to lower rates of interest; but the most suitable machinery for this will depend on current circumstances.

The case for a comprehensive national programme lies in the extent and urgency of the housing problem; but the creation of employment by new capital expenditure on building is also of great importance. Much clap-trap is spoken about the limited effects of public expenditure on employment; but it is clear that in so far as the capital spent on building would not otherwise be used in giving employment, every penny goes in income to somebody, and by far the greater part in wages. How the resulting employment and increased purchasing power are distributed is difficult to state in detail; but they are undoubtedly created. Moreover, the beneficial effects of large new expenditure extend far beyond the persons immediately concerned; while the State finances benefit by reductions in the number of unemployed and by increased proceeds of taxation.

Subsidies

If the Government actually built and owned the houses and undertook their maintenance, there would be a very strong case for the Exchequer bearing the whole cost of financial assistance. But if the local authorities are for the most part responsible for housing operations, it is difficult from a practical point of view to divorce them from some financial responsibility. Otherwise, the Exchequer could only protect itself by the closest supervision and regulation of details. Such protection would be specially necessary in the acquisition of sites and slum-clearing, and would be a definite handicap to the scale and rapidity of action contemplated.

It is not forgotten that the incidence of rates is often unfair, and that the whole scheme of local finance stands in need of overhaul; but whether the present rating system continues or not, it is submitted that where a local authority functions as an executive spending body, it must either have some measure of financial responsibility or else it must be tied hand and foot by whoever is meeting the bill, in this case the Exchequer.

At the same time, any local contribution should be related to ability to pay.

It appears possible to devise a fairly simple formula which would in each case apportion the cost of a given subsidy between the Exchequer and the local authority broadly in accordance with this principle. There is no exact measure of the ability of an area to pay; but total rates in the pound, qualified by rateable value per head of population, would seem to be worth careful examination as a suitable basis, and would avoid the needless complexities of the 1929 Local Government Act formula. The adoption of the principle, following the precedent of the Housing (Rural Authorities) Act, 1931, would enable the Exchequer to bear up to the whole subsidy cost in cases where such special assistance was essential, as for example in necessitous areas.

The county borough, non-county borough and urban district councils in England and Wales, and the burgh and county councils in Scotland, will continue to be responsible for the local contributions. But in the rural districts of England and Wales it will have to be considered how far the local contribution should be shared by the rural district council and the county council, in the latter case as a charge on the general county rate, and how far the county councils should be given housing powers concurrent with those of the rural districts. In Scotland a corresponding arrangement may be necessary with the very small burghs and the county councils. The London County Council will be the primary housing authority in London, responsible for the local contribution towards its own building; but where a metropolitan borough builds for itself, the local contribution might be met in equal parts by the borough and the county council.

For ordinary new building, there is much to be said for the Wheatley type of subsidy, of a fixed amount over a period of years, or its lump-sum equivalent. In an area such as London, where costs are appreciably higher than average, and in rural and

distressed areas where financial resources are small or specially low rents are desirable, higher standard rates of subsidy will be necessary; and adjustments will also have to be made in the case of smaller houses for aged persons, or where flats or tenements are inevitable, or where site costs are specially high, as in some large cities. An alternative subsidy method, the payment of interest charges (but not sinking fund) by the Exchequer, merits further inquiry. This, of course, is an alternative form of Exchequer subsidy; and whether it provides a sufficient subsidy or otherwise, for the particular purpose, depends on housing costs at the time.

For slum-clearing, there appear to be many advantages in the 1930 Act type of subsidy—a fixed amount per person rehoused, with a local contribution per house provided.

Consolidation of Subsidies

A further matter for consideration is the pooling or consolidation of the subsidies given under the various post-war Acts, and the fixing of rents of all local authority houses on the same basis. The existing haphazard position is unsatisfactory. It is desirable that uniformity of treatment should be introduced as soon as possible, and some special financial assistance may be required for the purpose.

It will be necessary simultaneously to standardise the conditions imposed on the local authorities under the Acts, one of which must be that no subsidy houses can be sold, but all must be available for letting.

In this connection, it is also proposed that a number of housing estates now under the control of other Government Departments should be transferred to the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland. These might be managed by the Commission, or in suitable cases entrusted to the appropriate local authorities as part of their housing pool.

Differential Rents

If some families cannot afford more than a 5s. rent, and the principal of differentiation is not applied, they will only be catered for if and when all rents are reduced to the 5s. level.

This has been the trouble with most of the post-War subsidy building—that the levels of standard rents have been too high for the low-paid worker. We have witnessed the spectacle of local

authorities imposing an income test for a variety of reasons: to ensure that subsidised houses are tenanted by families which can afford the rent, or to ensure that they are not tenanted by families which can afford to pay more, or in order to fix rents according to ability to pay.

Differential rents can now be applied under Labour's Slum-Clearing Act of 1930. Ministry of Health Circular 1138 states :

"The new grant, together with the prescribed contribution from the rates, will enable local authorities to let a sufficient proportion of the new houses at rents which the displaced persons can afford. Experience does not suggest that all the displaced persons will be unable to pay ordinary municipal rents, but a proportion, varying from area to area, will, undoubtedly, need special assistance. To secure this, the Act expressly empowers the charging of different rents to different tenants, and it is the clear intention of Parliament that the benefit of the new grant shall not enure to persons for whom it is not needed.

"The grant, together with the prescribed rate charge, should be regarded as a pool out of which such abatements, or other special arrangements in regard to rent as the local authority propose, are to be financed. It will be seen that while the grant is based on the number of persons displaced (and rehoused) it is in no sense tied either to persons or to houses."

A number of schemes are in operation under the 1930 Act, and a few under earlier Acts. In these latter, rent relief is given primarily in respect of dependent children. The 1930 Act schemes vary greatly, and a useful analysis in *The Anti-Slum Campaign* grades them roughly into three types:

(a) The most common type is where a maximum rent is fixed. This is paid by all tenants whose income reaches a certain maximum scale which rises with the number of dependent children. Rent rebates are allowed according to the amount by which income falls short of the appropriate maximum, subject, however, to the payment of a certain minimum rent. Rebates are usually reviewed quarterly.

(b) A second type is where a minimum rent is fixed. This is paid by tenants whose incomes are at or below a minimum income-dependency scale. Those with incomes above the scale pay additional amounts.

(c) In the third type, sometimes combined with the second, the actual amount of rebate is determined on the merits of each case, with or without a formal income limit above which no rebate is granted.

To these must be added the Leeds scheme, which applies the differential principle to the whole of the 1923, 1924 and 1930 Act houses, charges the economic rent (and not a subsidised maximum) to tenants who can pay it, fixes a minimum income scale below

which 100 per cent. rent rebate is given, and in the intermediate cases grants rebates according to the amount of income. The rebates are reviewed at half-yearly intervals or on any change of circumstances of the tenants.

Case for Differential Principle

The rents dilemma has been indicated. If the poorest families are to be properly housed, they must have very low rents; so that to house them, it is necessary either to apply differential rents or to reduce all houses to the same very low rents.

The decision as to the principle cannot be in doubt. The demands of the social services on public funds are so great and urgent, and the amount available under existing conditions so limited in relation to the need, that the best results can only be obtained by a careful schedule of priorities; and it is, for the time being at least, quite out of the question to consider letting *all* local authority houses at the minimum rents necessary for the poorest families.

"Each according to his need" is a good Socialist precept, especially when there is little enough to go round; and it is believed that housing subsidies can be put to the best use, and best benefit according to need, by the adoption of the differential principle.

It may be added that the differential principle will be of assistance in the consolidation of housing subsidies given under the various post-War Acts. If all local authority houses are to be brought into one general scheme and placed on the same rent basis, a satisfactory solution of many serious rent problems will only be achieved through the elasticity of differentiation.

On the other hand, acceptance of the principle as such must not be taken to imply that differentiation provides a solution of the rent problem. It is merely an expedient for meeting certain current financial difficulties. Nor, as things are, is it possible to apply the principle satisfactorily in every district. It is out of the question, for example, in depressed areas—unless special financial assistance is given by the Exchequer; and this is also true of many areas not normally described as "depressed." It is even more out of the question to apply a uniform scheme of differentiation throughout the country as a whole, without special assistance to many areas and the adjustment of assistance to particular local needs. The application of the principle will require the closest

consideration, in the light of the various experiments now being made. Its administration is only at the experimental stage.

To the contention that differentiation tackles the job at the wrong end, and that the proper remedy is to raise incomes, it can only be said that the remedy is comparatively slow, the evil insistent, and the palliative present and potent. We believe that the subsidised social services have considerably improved the standard of living and tended to increase wages rather than reduce them. Moreover, it is wrong to argue that the better-off tenant will be made to contribute to the rent of the poorer tenant. The better-off tenant will contribute nothing whatever, except in his capacity as tax and ratepayer, in which respect he is in precisely the same position as other people. We are applying the subsidy in accordance with need, and in so far as the better-off tenant requires assistance he will get it.

RURAL HOUSING

No general report on housing can be complete without special reference to the rural problem. The Labour Party policy report, *The Land and the National Planning of Agriculture*, points out that the problem is twofold—the tied cottage and the shortage of fit cottages—and on the former declares:

“The tied cottage is not everywhere regarded as essential; many farms are run without a single tied cottage being attached to them. Even if some inconvenience may be caused by a change, it is not in the public interest, nor in the best interests of agriculture, to continue a system which undermines the workers’ sense of independence and responsibility, and gives to the employer a social and political power quite outside the normal relations of employer and worker. It is imperative that the tied cottage should be abolished.

“It is therefore proposed that after a given date every farm worker in a tied cottage should be regarded as a tenant under the Rent Restrictions Acts; that where there is no existing tenancy, the rent should be that fixed by the County Wages Committee for minimum wage purposes; and that the employer should not be entitled to obtain possession until the existence of suitable alternative accommodation is proved.”

The abolition of the tied cottage is vital, but by itself insufficient. Before the war there was an acute shortage of dwellings for farm workers, while many of the existing cottages were very old and large numbers were damp, dark and dilapidated. Thousands of families were crowded into dwellings unfit for human habitation.

Low wages made it impossible for the farm worker to pay more than a low rent; and because rents were low, building was not a business proposition. Condemned to low wages, the farm worker was also condemned to unsatisfactory housing. With the post-War rise in the cost of building, the disparity between economic rents and the workers' means became more accentuated and intensified the difficulties of the situation. Moreover, the rural housing authorities have with few exceptions shown themselves either unwilling or unable to accept their responsibilities.

The recognition of particular rural difficulties by the 1924 and 1930 Acts and the Rural Cottages Act of 1931—although subsequently nullified to a considerable extent by the "National" Government—was a big advance.

The Commission must pay particular attention to rural housing, in close co-operation with any organisation established for the national planning of agriculture. In the building of new cottages, which must be up to urban standards, the amount of land to be attached to each, and the general lay-out of building schemes, demand careful consideration. Adequate water supply is of first importance; and lighting, power and transport facilities must be developed. The cottages should be built in the villages rather than by ones and twos on isolated farms; for everything must be done to counter the isolation in which the farm worker has often hitherto been placed, and only by living in communities is it possible to develop a satisfactory social life. Detached cottages will still exist; but public building must primarily be community building.

Just as housing schemes in the towns should be arranged in relation to the general town plan, so in the villages the schemes should be conceived as part of village extension, and provision made for social amenities. Every village should be provided with recreation fields; and with a public meeting place which can become the centre of social and intellectual life, the home of the village library, the headquarters of local societies, and the village concert and dance hall. It is obviously the duty of the local councils, with appropriate Exchequer assistance, to provide the necessary halls; for there are many disadvantages, and often objectionable interference and restriction by the donors, when the provision is left to private individuals or societies. What is visualised is a village community, with proper social and recreational amenities, and with its own vigorous life.

Where there exists a proved demand for land, farm workers should be granted access to land close to their cottages. Small-holdings are discussed in Labour's agricultural policy. Where allotments are still required, every obstacle to their provision should be removed. The chief immediate requirement is to make the local authorities use the powers they now possess. The national housing programme should envisage schemes of village planning which would render land available for garden and allotment cultivation near to the homes of the workers.

CONCLUSION

We have outlined the methods the next Labour Government will adopt to house the nation in decency and comfort. In a separate report, *Fair Rents and No Profiteering*, we describe our policy for the control and regulation of the rents of existing houses. In other policy reports we deal with related matters such as water supply, electricity, transport facilities, and so forth.

If we emphasise the primary importance of housing it is just because it is primary.

Under the legislation of the "National" Government there are very serious limits to what even Labour-controlled councils can do, for they are tied hand and foot by that legislation, especially as regards ordinary new houses and rents.

The drastic and sustained action we propose here is only possible under a Labour Government.

We ask for the right to give the people of our country a chance to get away from conditions which are a continual drag on civilised living.

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