

Housing Talk But No Houses

Toronto Paper Criticizes The Governments

"Passing The Buck"

Says the Work is Being Passed Down the Line and That There is Lack of Courage in Dealing With the Matter

(Toronto Star.)

In our article of yesterday on the housing problem we find that we did the civic authorities of Toronto a great injustice.

All our authorities, federal, provincial and municipal, know the urgent need for action, but all, we said, run away from the facts.

The dominion authorities profess deep concern about housing, but all they do is offer to lend money to the provinces. The provincial authorities are deeply concerned, but what they do is offer to loan money to the municipality. They hand the thing on to the city. Then, we asked in our article of yesterday, "what does the city find when it takes up the problem?" "It finds," we said, "that the buck can be passed no further, and all activity ceases."

In saying that, we did the civic authorities an injustice. The committee appointed by the City of Toronto has just as much fertility in the ways of futurity as any federal or provincial commission, and in its report the civic committee recommends that, instead of the city taking this money for housing and becoming responsible for it, the province should lend its money to the loan companies and let them handle it and lend it out, and that private housing companies should get busy. So we find that the city, too, following example, has passed the buck, and there you are. That is as far as it has got yet.

They all know because nobody can look into the problem at all without discovering, that the offering of money at 5 per cent will not cause to be built on suitable sites houses that can be sold or rented at reasonable cost, because land is at too high a speculative value and because building materials cost too much. The federal, provincial and municipal commissions all know this, but they all run away from the facts.

The federal authorities expect the provincial people to show the courage the case needs; the provincial experts hope the municipal authorities will show the courage; the municipal committee hopes—or perhaps only wonders—if the loan companies couldn't take cheaper money than their own and work the miracle of producing cheap houses on dear land and with expensive materials.

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Three of our governments admit the great, the pressing urgency of this problem, but they hand it along, doing nothing with it but making talk, until it is plumped down in the possible hope that private business interests, like the loan companies, may be able to do something with it.

But this brings it back and leaves it pretty much where it lay before any government commission or committee ever had anything to do with it.

There is a shortage of houses because the building of them does not pay. That is where the problem started and that is where it ends after all the talk and the tons of matter that has been printed about it.

All our governments, high, low, and middle, know the facts. We quoted the

dominion government's housing expert yesterday, and the best he could say about 5 per cent money as an inducement for anybody to build houses was this: "The saving would be equivalent to about 20 per cent on the cost of a house, and will go a long way to counteract the present high cost of building." A long way, but not all the way. He knew about the present high cost of materials and he also knew that suitable land is held out of use at figures that make it impossible for use in building workmen's houses. He wrote in his report:

"One of the most important questions which will arise in connection with housing schemes is in regard to the purchase of land. Some simpler procedure should be introduced in the provinces to enable land to be acquired at a low price

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for erecting small houses. At present the workingman has too many 'interests' against him in wanting a site at reasonable cost for a home." He knows, and they all know. But none of the authorities, high, low, or middle, offers to do anything beyond suggesting that some other authority do something. If we are going to see anything done, that almost unknown thing, courage, must put in an appearance in our various governments and all their various commissions. Land must be expropriated for building purposes here as faced the fact and has adopted a way to overcome both these difficulties. Do we want houses? If so the causes of the shortage must be removed.

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