

Housing in Great Britain and Canada—Continued.

health and contentment of the people of this land for many generations to come lies to a large extent in the hands of the bodies which they themselves elect to manage their local concerns. It is a test of capacity; it is also a test of democracy.

Will the local councils rise to their opportunity and justify the trust which has been placed in them? To judge by the numbers of schemes which have been prepared, there is every reason to believe that they will. But it is most necessary that everyone should fully realise that the responsibility does not rest with the local councils alone. Even the best local authorities are the better and the stronger if an active interest in their proceedings is taken by the electors, while, on the other hand, if good houses are not provided wherever needed, if unfit houses are not made fit, if slums are never cleared, every local elector must bear his or her share of the blame.

Equally is it the concern of every local elector not only to think of housing in terms of the present need, but to look to the future, and to see to it that the local authority is doing the same. Although it is not to be expected that every local authority, while engaged in drawing up its housing scheme, will also prepare a town plan, yet any building which they may undertake should be considered in relation to the effect it will have upon the future development of the area. The new Act empowers the Ministry of Health to require any local authority at any time to prepare a town plan. It is to be hoped, however, that, now that the subject is so much in everyone's mind, there will be little need for a central Department to stimulate or coerce, but that each local authority will make every possible use of the new powers with which they are entrusted with the view of playing their part in making the England of the future a country of happy, healthy homes.

Acquisition of Land.

To turn to certain details, it may be pointed out that among the important alterations in the law brought about by the Act, is the simplification and cheapening of the acquisition of land for housing purposes. The Local Authorities had already power, with the sanction of the Local Government Board, to acquire land compulsorily where they could not obtain it by agreement, but further facilities were needed to make this power fully effective.

The provisions as to the assessment of compensation are especially important in connection with slum clearances. The heavy prices which had formerly to be paid by Local Authorities for land coveted by insanitary dwellings was one of the chief obstacles to the improvement of the poor districts in towns. The new Act, in conjunction with the Acquisition of Land Bill, will afford much relief in this respect.

Not only is the price to be paid for such land in future to be the value of the land as a site cleared of buildings, but where the land is to be used for re-housing or as an open space the price will be fixed by official valuers at a lower rate than if it were to be used for factories or other more remunerative purposes. In order that there may be no unfairness as between land owners through this differentiation of price according to the purposes for which the land is to be used, it is provided that, if one portion of the land so acquired is to be used for re-housing and another portion for business premises, while the valuation for the two parts will be at different rates, the price for the whole will be pooled, and all the land owners will be paid at the same rate.

Acquisition of Houses.

The new power given to Local Authorities to purchase houses of any interest therein may increase the provision of working-class dwellings in two ways. There may be cases where a Local Authority can buy and let to working men suitable houses which would otherwise not be available for them. The more frequent use of this power, however, would no doubt be in the direction of buying houses at present too large or otherwise unsuitable for the working classes and no longer useful for other purposes and converting them into flats.

It is also to be noted that a Local Authority may contract for the purchase or lease to them of houses suitable for the working classes, whether built at the date of the contract or intended to be built thereafter.

House Ownership.

For those who prefer to own rather than rent a house, increased facilities are given by the new Act.

By the amendments to the Small Dwellings Acquisition Act, a Local Authority or a County Council, can now lend up to 85 per cent. of the value of any house not exceeding in value £800, to enable any person resident in the district to buy the house in which he lives or intends to live.

Another method, however, of attaining the same object is provided by section 15 (1) (d) of the Act, under which a Local Authority may, with the consent of the Ministry of Health, sell any houses acquired or erected by them on the land under a scheme, and may agree to the payment of part of the price being secured by a mortgage on the premises.

It is an important qualification to the latter power that it must be a condition of such sale that the houses shall not be used by any person for the time being having any interest in them for the purpose of housing persons in his employment.

Improvements and Repairs.

Reference has already been made to the cheaper terms upon which it will now be possible to obtain land for slum clearances. This eases the obligation which rests upon Local Authorities to wipe out of existence the slum areas and the unfit houses which are incapable of improvement, and to take steps for the improvement of those which need it and are capable of it. It is to be remembered that while outside London, Town and Urban District Councils are the authorities concerned under Part I, of the Act of 1890 in the clearing of slum areas, not only they, but the Rural District Council, also, are responsible under Part II of the Act of 1890 for minor clearances and for closing and, where necessary, demolishing unfit houses and for removing buildings which gravely interfere with proper ventilation or are otherwise obstructive.

By means of their powers of closing houses and of preventing nuisances, the Local Authorities could always insist upon the remedying of many evils in working-class dwellings. They can, if such a dwelling is not reasonably fit for human habitation, serve a notice upon the owner requiring him, within a reasonable time, to do such work as may be necessary, but it is, of course, important in the present exceptional circumstances, that discretion be used in the demands which authorities make upon owners.

Moreover, a Local Authority may lend money to a house owner to enable him to carry out such work as may be necessary for the reconstruction, enlargement or improvement of a house or building to make it suitable as a dwelling for the working classes.

Government Publications.

In order to assist everyone concerned in mastering the details of the new Act, the Ministry of Health are bringing out a four-page leaflet, setting out briefly its principal provisions. A copy of this leaflet is being sent to each member of Local Authorities. A booklet has also been prepared by the Ministry, and is being published by them in conjunction with the Ministry of Reconstruction as one of the series of "Reconstruction Problems," entitled "Housing: The Powers and Duties of Local Authorities."

8,000 MILES OF RURAL TELEPHONE COSTRUCTION IN SASKATCHEWAN.

Rural telephone construction this year in the province of Saskatchewan is stated by Mr. D. C. McNab to be slightly above normal, with condition healthy and prospects bright. "While there have been years," said Mr. McNab, "in which more rapid development has been made, it is estimated that from 7,500 to 8,000 new telephone mileage will be completed this year."

"The statement has frequently been heard that it is impossible to forecast the development in a city or town, and therefore not practical to plan comprehensively for its future growth. Unfortunately, places in this country have been unplanned from the beginning, and by treating additions and developments in piecemeal fashion, a chaotic growth has occurred, resulting in the above erroneous deduction. The leading cities in the United States have recognized the dangers and harmful consequences of unregulated expansion, and have been adopting regulations as to use, districts and building restrictions."—Saskatchewan Municipal Department.