

The Re-Planning of Rheims

In the French press there is some criticism of the appointment of Mr. George B. Ford, of New York, to re-plan the devastated city of Rheims, first because he is a foreigner and second because the introduction of American methods into the city "in which the kings of France were crowned" was desecration, and no doubt the criticism will meet with the sympathy of many Canadians who from close war associations have come to love this thirteenth century shrine of Old France. But it should be stated that the city authorities of Rheims did not call upon Mr. Ford to submit a plan until the French architects had had an opportunity to show what they could do under the new town-planning law that had recently been passed. The fact is, town-planning has never been studied in France to anything like the extent that one would expect in a nation of artists and engineers, whereas in the United States town-planning has become a science, giving full employment to hundreds of experts,

such as Mr. Ford, though we do think that the Rheims authorities would have been well advised in associating with the New York expert at least one of the great architects of France, for no matter how eminent a man may be in town-planning in the United States, he is not always a success outside that country. We have found this out in Canada, where conditions are somewhat similar, but where the climate demands certain types of architecture and engineering unknown to our neighbours. The town-planner used to the building of new cities does not, and cannot be expected to, understand the traditions of older communities, consequently he has a tendency to tear down everything that would interfere with his set plan. Fortunately in Mr. Ford, whose articles have appeared in the columns of this Journal, the city authorities of Rheims have one of the most cultured of advisers—one of the very few who does not sacrifice tradition in his plans.

The Housing Problem in Canada

One of the most significant resolutions passed at the U.C.M. Convention urged that interest on the housing loans be reduced one per cent by each of the loaning authorities. As the Dominion housing loan passes through the hands of the Federal, Provincial and Municipal bodies, it means that the country would sacrifice three per cent, and the final borrowers would get cheap money. The idea is based on the policy of the British Government and British local authorities in loaning money to build cottages at the low rate of three per cent interest, which costs the country around six per cent. How far the authorities of this country will consider such a suggestion is hard to say, but there is no doubt that if the housing problem is to be solved in Canada better terms must be offered to workers desirous of building their own homes. The idea of housing companies has not received much encouragement in any of the Provinces, and speculative building would seem to be confined to high rented apartment houses and to the more expensive type of dwellings, so that it is to the workers themselves the opportunity must be given to build their own cottages. At the moment the interest charges, sinking fund, insurance and taxes work out to over 10 per cent on the loans advanced, which means the borrower must pay \$450 per year on a house costing \$4,500, the lowest price at which cottages can be built today. This figure is beyond the pocket of the average worker, so that he is barred from participating in the Dominion housing scheme under the conditions attached to each loan. The only exception to the cottage building stagnation is in Ontario where the difficulty has been partially met by the closest co-operation between the Provincial Director of Housing and the local authorities and the determination of the latter bodies to do all that is possible to encourage the citizens to build for themselves. But with all the enthusiasm and co-operation the problem of housing is not near

solved even in Ontario, so that there is much to be said in favour of the U.C.M. resolution, in spite of its somewhat radical nature. The fact that a convention of men representing the municipalities of Canada seriously discussed the idea is certainly a strong indication of the sentiment of the country, and neither the Dominion nor Provincial authorities can afford to ignore the question.

One of the pertinent suggestions put to the U. C. M. Convention was that if the different governments found that it paid to invest millions on good roads it was surely a good policy to invest in hygienic housing for the workers, particularly when the present shortage is become a menace to the health of the nation. It is computed that in Canada there is a shortage of over 50,000 houses, which means that there are 50,000 families living with other families a state of affairs not conducive to that standard of living urged by social welfare students.

Now that the question has been taken up by the Union of Canadian Municipalities it is hoped that it will be pushed forward until the Dominion and Provincial governments take action. While we are not strong advocates of Royal Commissions as a rule, there are times when they are necessary if only to find out exactly the state of certain conditions, such as those affecting the housing of the people, and our suggestion is that a Commission be appointed under the Chairmanship of Mr. Thomas Adams, who has studied the housing problem in all its phases, together with one representative each from the Provincial governments, the Provincial Municipal Unions and the Union of Canadian Municipalities. Such a Commission should be instructed not only to study and report on the housing conditions in Canada, but to make definite recommendations for their amelioration. Then the issue would be clear and concise and the people would know what to do.