

CANADA'S HOUSING PROBLEM

Shortage of Living Accommodation Is One of War's Effects

Mr. Thomas Adams, the town planning advisor of the Commission of Conservation, gave an instructive address on the housing problem, at the Convention of the Civic Improvement League and the Union of Canadian Municipalities on Wednesday, July 10, in Victoria, B.C. This problem has been pressing itself urgently upon the public, but no important government or municipal action has been taken as yet. The main points of Mr. Adams' discussion were as follows:—

"The working-class housing conditions in the industrial sections of Canadian cities were unsatisfactory before the war and even then the cost of housing accommodation was steadily increasing. Since the conditions caused by the war have begun to operate, private enterprise has practically ceased to engage in building operations. As a result, we are to-day faced with a Dominion-wide agitation to the effect that there is a shortage of houses in most cities and towns. The causes of this shortage differ in certain respects, but, in the main, they are due to scarcity and dearth of money and labor and the high cost of material. These causes have practically killed private enterprise, as there is not sufficient certainty that rents or purchase prices will rise to meet the increased cost, to justify private capital being invested in this class of undertaking. It may be assumed that private enterprise will cease to be much of a factor in connection with the building of houses until economic conditions become stabilized.

"There are different housing problems. One is connected with war industries, promoted wholly by government agencies. For instance, the British government, through the Imperial Munitions Board, has erected and financed munition plants to the extent of over 14 million dollars, employing 6,200 workers in Canada; the Canadian government has promoted war industries in different parts of the country and erected a new arsenal at Lindsay, Ont.; and there is said to have been appropriated for shipbuilding in Canada no less than \$89,500,000. Whereas in Great Britain and the United States expenditure of the above kind is being accompanied by expenditure on the erection of homes for workers, no step in that direction has been taken in Canada. This means that a special housing problem is created as a direct result of the war.

"There is a second problem, due to the tendency of population to drift, following the channels of employment. The war has created new sources of employment and destroyed others. In certain districts there is overcrowding as a result. This may or may not be temporary, but it has created a special housing problem—not quite new, but in an intensified form. A third problem is the general one of housing the industrial classes. Most countries recognize that there has been failure to deal adequately and properly with the housing of the workers in manufacturing industries, except in those comparatively rare instances where the manufacturers have themselves taken the responsibility to provide dwellings.

Large Sums Spent by Britain and United States.

"The problems in Canada do not differ from those in Great Britain and the United States in their main aspects. Because of the speculative system of developing suburban land, it is, however, the case that the cost of land for industrial housing is much higher in Canada than in Britain, and this has an injurious effect on housing conditions. The housing problem, as a whole, is one of tremendous importance, but, for the moment, while we are at war, it is necessary to concentrate on the aspect of it dealing with war industries. Nothing matters at the present time but the winning of the war, and if houses are needed to assist in that object, they should be built by some one. Britain and the United States are erecting houses as a war measure by means of housing schemes promoted and financed by the national government. Several hundred million dollars have been invested in this connection by the British government and recently 110 million dollars was appropriated for the same purpose by the United States government. The initiative in this matter was taken in Britain after much research into the question of industrial fatigue and the application of physiological science to the details of industrial life. There is no illusion either in Britain or in the United States as to the necessity for spending money on houses and also on recreation and social facilities, with the direct object of winning

the war." Mr. Adams here described the housing schemes at Gretna, Rosyth, Woolwich, England and in the United States, with illustrations.

"It is claimed that in Canada," continued Mr. Adams, "we also need houses to help in winning the war. Some of the leading manufacturers of munitions have informed me that their output is limited for want of labor, and that they cannot get efficient labor for want of housing accommodation. There is no doubt that doubling up of families and emigration of the best workers has followed from the shortage of houses in certain districts, resulting in both loss of efficiency on the part of those who are overcrowded, and the loss of some of the best men who are not prepared to stay under overcrowded conditions. Faced by such a situation as we have at present in Canada, it seems as if there is no other course than that the government should step in and assist in providing houses, where needed, to secure the maximum of production for war purposes. If it follows the lead given by Great Britain and the United States, it will not only assist with the provision of houses, or at least with the provision of capital, but will assume the burden of any loss that may accrue as a result of building houses during the war. All that they can do, and are likely to do, will be to lessen the shortage directly due to war industries and shipbuilding plants, relieving the general problem to that extent. In war industries must be included the production of food, and houses are needed in the rural districts.

"There is a fourth problem connected with the returned soldiers which should also be considered and dealt with by the government. In so far as the government is able to assist in providing housing accommodation for the returned men, they would help to relieve the pressure in connection with the general problem. Moreover, the need for giving the returned men the best available accommodation will be generally agreed to.

Methods of Government Housing.

"If it is accepted that the government must build houses as a war measure, how should they proceed? Under such conditions, there can be no question whether it is the business of the government to do the work, since there is no other who can do it. Before the war, the government did not engage in industry to the extent it does now, and it is only now doing what is necessary. When you come to deal with housing, however, the responsibility of carrying out the work should be divided among the Federal, the provincial and the municipal governments. War housing being the only question before us to-day, is a matter for which the Federal government may be regarded as primarily responsible. The Federal government is the authority under the War Measures Act. But owing to our constitution it is desirable that the responsibility for controlling building operations should, as far as possible, be delegated to provincial and municipal governments. Large employers of labor who need housing accommodation should be made to co-operate in any government scheme.

"It seems to be wrongly assumed that municipal governments do not at present help to finance housing in this country. As a matter of fact all the expenditure of the municipality is, in a sense, part of the cost of housing. From the appended statistics it will be seen that in the case of a working man paying \$20 a month, he is enjoying the expenditure made by the community of at least \$1,000 on his home and on the improvements and facilities given in connection with it. One fact in connection with this expenditure by the city is that it is the net cost of the service, whereas the investment of the private person in the same connection produces a profit of from 10 to 1,000 per cent., from the site and from 15 to 25 per cent. on the cost of the dwelling. By the city engaging in building operations, it would merely be helping to stabilize its investment in the development of the land.

"If government housing were resorted to in this country it should be carried out by a joint partnership between Federal, provincial and municipal authorities. The Federal government should provide the funds and set up a central expert advisory and supervisory board; it should only build houses directly under its own control for employees in government factories, arsenals, naval establishments or railways. In all other cases housing operations in connection with war industries and returned soldiers should be carried out by the municipalities with the aid of funds and expert advice provided by the Federal government. Departments of the provincial government should take the responsibility for the proper administration of municipal housing schemes, under the regulations of the Federal government and subject to its supreme control in