

# Government Housing in Canada

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The July issue of the National Municipal Review of last year contained an article by Mr. Thomas Adams, Housing and Town Planning Adviser to the Canadian Government entitled "Canada's Drive for Better Housing." Mr. Adams described the Canadian housing policy as tentative and experimental and admitted that it involved almost revolutionary changes in housing methods. It had to meet and overcome the powerful objection that hitherto the provision of houses had been regarded as the prerogative of the building industry and any government action was an interference with private enterprise.

The answer to this objection was obvious and conclusive. It was that private enterprise had practically ceased to operate in the construction of workmen's dwellings and any further reliance upon the supposed potency of the law of demand and supply was perilous and impossible. Accumulated evidence showed that the housing conditions of most towns and cities were a menace to the health and welfare of the people and, in the interest of the race, the housing of the working classes must be accepted as a national responsibility. Private enterprise had abandoned the task because there was no money in it.

The Canadian Government decided to inaugurate a loan of \$25,000,000 for the purpose of national housing. This money was to be distributed among the nine provinces, pro rata to the population. The money was loaned at 5 per cent interest and the provinces were to accept the responsibility of the administration of the loan. The project represented a co-operative effort among federal, provincial and municipal governments. The federal responsibility consisted in supplying the capital, in establishing certain general principles for better housing and in keeping a general oversight of the provincial housing schemes, which had to receive the approval of the Federal Housing Committee. The indications are that the whole of the loan will be taken up during the present year.

## Municipal Housing

The significance of the movement is contained in the term "municipal housing." The final executive of the local municipal housing commission and it may at once be admitted that the legitimacy of municipal housing has been established in Canada through the logic of an urgent human need. The public conscience was shocked and distressed by the bad housing conditions of the workers and orthodox economic doctrines had to be scrapped. There was no supply to meet the imperative human demand involving the welfare of thousands of families and returned soldiers. It was frankly recognized that private enterprise had not only failed to meet the social need but also that the provision it had made in the past with the single incentive of private gain had been deplorably unsatisfactory. As there came a time in all civilized countries when it was recognized that private enterprise in education had become an ignoble failure and the more powerful instrument of government machinery had to be called into operation, so the time had come for the birth of national conviction that the provision of proper dwellings for the people, where families could be reared in decency and comfort could not be left to the operation of a spasmodic law of demand and supply that had nothing more benevolent for its incentive than the making of profit.

## Houses Built

The Canadian housing act has now been in operation for over a year and some results may be indicated. With the aid of the federal grant, about 1,600 houses have been built and in contra-distinction to the British policy—which has practically abandoned the hope of building for economic return—the Canadian houses are expected to pay for their construction. It is also noteworthy that though the amount of the Canadian grant is extremely small in comparison with the British appropriation, the number of houses actually built at the time of writing is larger in Canada than in Britain. The British minister, replying to a question in the House of Commons stated that the number completed, up to April 1, was 1,306, though he stated that 12,136 other houses were in various stages of construction.

## Ontario Leads

For the Canadian achievement the chief credit must be given to the province of Ontario which early adopted a vigorous and progressive policy and raised a special loan,

as a province, of \$2,000,000. Ontario has completed 1,184 houses. To this province was allotted the sum of \$8,753,291 of the federal loan and the housing report of the province states that if all the requests received from the municipalities for loans were met another eight million dollars would be required. With the change of government a new housing act has been adopted by the province of Ontario, entitled "The Municipal Housing Act" which is similar in nature to the housing act of 1919 except that the municipalities will no longer take advantage of the federal loan but will issue debentures which will be guaranteed by the province. On account of the steady increase in the cost of building, which is placed at 25 per cent for the year of activity, the maximum amount of loan has been raised from \$4,500 to \$5,100.

In the Ontario housing act soldiers, widows, or widowed mothers of soldiers may be advanced 100 per cent of the value of the house, land and improvements, where the land has been acquired by the housing commission. Civilians must purchase the land or advance 10 per cent of the value of the house, land and improvements from the local housing commission. The municipalities may deposit their debentures with the province without limiting their borrowing powers.

A similar act to the Ontario act of 1919 was passed by the province of Nova Scotia. Several towns have appointed housing commissions and much activity is promised for the present building season.

In the province of New Brunswick, fifty houses have been built.

The original act of Quebec was devoted exclusively to the building of garden suburbs in the neighborhoods around the chief industrial centers but the act has been modified in this respect and will be applied more largely to assisting individual lot owners to build houses for themselves. Some twenty houses have been constructed.

In Manitoba an act was passed that gives preference to returned soldiers over other applicants for loans and various municipalities bordering on the city of Winnipeg are taking advantage of the act. Over seventy houses have been built and about twice that number are in course of construction. It is expected that at least 350 houses will be completed during the present season. Manitoba also expects to make a provincial grant for housing purposes of \$1,000,000.

In British Columbia the government conveys free land to soldiers for housing purposes or to municipalities for the benefit of soldiers. About fifty houses have been built, ninety are under construction and there is a program for the present season of about 300 houses.

## The Uses of Town Planning.

The application of town planning principles to the problem of housing depends upon an educational process that involves an extent of social vision that widens very slowly. Where the affections gather round a home or a homestead it is perfectly well known that the home means something more than a house it means; also the surroundings of the home; its setting; its environment. Where a house provides no opportunity for outdoor life in the summer time the development of the gracious associations and memories that make the romance and contentment of home is impossible. There are thousands of houses in every town and city where the only outdoor life of the home is a chair in the noisy and unlovely street.

Town planning would give to the humblest resident the chance of outdoor home life and this is a part of the Canadian policy. In the capital city of Ottawa an estate of twenty-two acres has been acquired at Lindenlea by the Ottawa housing commission in the beautiful suburb of Rockcliffe and has been laid out on town planning lines by Mr. Thomas Adams. The estate is well wooded and most of the trees are being preserved. The rectangular method of subdividing suburban property has been abandoned and for economical and aesthetic reasons the contour of the land has been followed instead. The main feature of the street plan is a diagonal road called Rockcliffe Way. This will form the main artery and will be an

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