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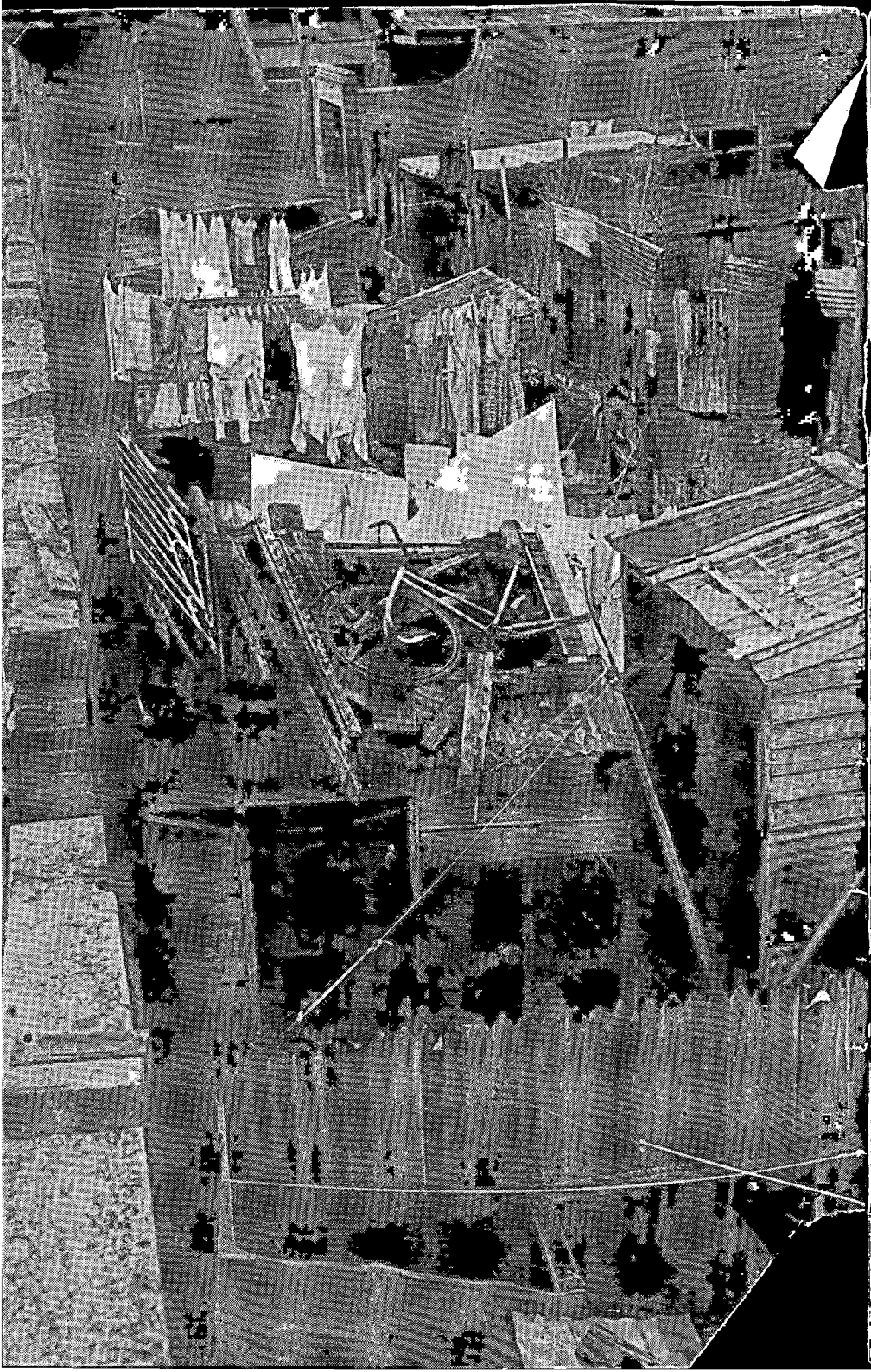
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WHAT'S WRONG WITH VICTORIA'S HOUSING PROGRAMME?

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**WHAT'S WRONG
WITH VICTORIA'S
HOUSING PROGRAMMEA**

An analysis af some of Victoria's housing
problems by the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.
Melbourne, 1954

FOREWORD

THE ONLY JUSTIFICATION for a State housing programme is to house that section of the community which cannot by its own efforts provide adequate housing for itself.

Looking back we see how in Victoria the Government entered the housing field solely on this basis. The Housing Commission was formed only after intense public agitation on the question of slums. It was realised that families living in sub-standard housing were unable to re-house themselves. In their interest and in the interests of public welfare, the State, through the Housing Commission, set out to rehouse slum dwellers.

During the war years home building ceased and as soon as the war ended the Government diverted the Housing Commission from slum reclamation to the task of meeting the overwhelming general demand for houses.

Whether this was correct or not is now unimportant. What is important is that this diversion to general home building has caused the Government to lose sight of the fact that Government housing policy should be based on needs - that is to say it should aim to help those whose claim for help is greatest.

This report indicates how completely we have departed from the yardstick of needs in our State housing programme. It shows how the most needy section of the community has been neglected, and urges an overhaul of our housing programme to bring it into balance.

It does not say that those now getting houses should be deprived of assistance, but it does say that available funds and resources should be spread so that the most needy do find a place in our housing programme, and that we face up to the human problems involved in meeting the housing needs of this forgotten section of the community.

This is the point of view that the Brotherhood of St. Laurence today is trying to bring to the notice of all leaders of the community.

This report is the result of six'months' investigation by the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.

A house to home survey was conducted to determine living conditions in inner suburbs. Ninety-Six houses in two blocks in Fitzroy and South Melbourne were visited and sixty-eight of the houses were closely inspected and lengthy interviews were held with the occupants.

Eighteen families at Camp Pell and a further eleven familie~ whose applications for Commission homes had been rejected were also interviewed.

Discussions have been held with a wide range of people interested in housing, and information has been obtained on housing methods used overseas.

The interviewing was carried out by Miss T. M. Wardell, Dip. Soc. Stud. The report has been compiled and edited by Mr. David Scott, of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.

Photographs are by courtesy of "The Herald and Weekly Times Ltd".

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SLUMS-AND'S PLAN

A SLUM IS HOUSING so inadequate or so deteriorated as to endanger the health, safety and morals of its inhabitants.

In 1937, when the Housing Commission was set up in Victoria to abolish slums, there were 6,100 houses within five miles of the Melbourne G.P.O. officially recognised as slums.

Today - 17 years later - the official figure stands at 7,500, an increase of 1,400 or 23 per cent.

No matter how plausible official explanations might sound, one fact is clear beyond rebuttal: we set up a Government authority to get rid of the slums in 1937 and now 17 years later, the slums are not only still with us, but they are more extensive than ever before.

The official figures of the number of slums are only approximate. There are actually considerably more than 7,500 sub-standard dwellings today, but no one knows exactly how great the total is because no one has conducted a survey.

The official figures only represent the number of houses that have actually been condemned as unfit to live in. They do not include the countless dwellings, sub-standard in every respect, that have not been reported.

Men, women and children - lots of children - live in these sub-standard houses. The number in the 7,500 hovels that have been officially condemned would be in excess of 35,000. That works out at 4.6 persons to a house compared with the average for the whole of Victoria of 3.7.

Living Conditions

Living conditions for the people of "slumland" are often indescribably bad. An indication of how bad was given last year by a Brotherhood of St. Laurence survey of 68 houses in two slum pockets in Fitzroy and South Melbourne. Each of the 68 houses was thoroughly inspected by a Brotherhood research worker. The survey revealed that-

38 per cent. of the 68 houses were "very damp and in a very bad state of disrepair."

16 per cent. were damp.

51 per cent. were without kitchen sinks.

38 per cent. were without baths or had baths but no water laid on to them.

The number of occupants in 36 of the houses was 199 or 5.5 persons to a house.

Last year the Collingwood Medical Officer described sub-standard houses in his area in a report to the Collingwood Council. What he wrote accurately described conditions that can be observed in any of Melbourne's slum pockets from Fitzroy to South Melbourne and from Port Melbourne to Carlton. He reported:-

"Many houses are very old, damp, not weatherproof and are verminous and filthy. They are shared by families who are often living, cooking, eating and sleeping in one room. Bathing, sanitary and cooking facilities are woefully lacking.

"Contributory factors are the age of the houses, defective roofs, lack of sub-floor ventilation and rising dampness, bad drainage, fallen plaster, neglect of repairs by owners and damage by tenants. These conditions make them unfit for human habitation."

Let's briefly look at a family living in one of these sub-standard houses.

Mrs. R. is a widow. With her five children she lives in a tiny house of two rooms and a kitchen. All the rooms are dark, draughty and very damp.

The house was condemned as unfit for human habitation eight years ago. The rent is 12/6 a week and Mrs. R's total weekly income is £10/2/-.

There is no kitchen sink or bathroom. A tap in the yard is the only water supply.

The interviewer described Mrs. R as "a devoted mother, always endeavouring to improve the home."

The house is as neat as it could be under the conditions of extreme overcrowding. It has recently been kalsomined by the tenant, but dampness is already showing through.

Mrs. R is most anxious to move away for the moral and physical welfare of the children. She has made several applications to the Housing Commission.

She would like a new house so that she could "do things to it, have a garden, a nice path and nice floors to polish."

Effects Of Bad Housing

The bulk of the people living in slums are decent human beings like Mrs. R, whose morals are no better and no worse than other sections of the community. This is true, but so too

is the fact that the bad housing of the slums tends to develop crime, vice and sickness. The eradication of these anti-social trends cannot be achieved unless we take deliberate and determined action to remove one of their basic causes - bad housing.

Victorian Governments in the past have never failed to acknowledge the danger of slums or the urgency of doing something about getting rid of them. But without exception and no matter which party has been in power they have been content to give little more than lip service to the proposition that the slums must be cleared.

Economically their failure to act positively and with determination has been costly to the community for, of course, slums constitute a heavy burden on the taxpayer.

The Taxpayer Pays

The longer we allow our slums to fester in the heart of our capital city the more money we will have to spend on hospitals, mental institutions, reformatories and gaols. The more money we will have to find for unemployment relief, sickness benefits and invalid pensions. The more money we will have to contribute to our child welfare services and to the charities which help people solve the tragic problems so often created by bad living conditions and environment.

The realistic attitude towards slums and what should be done about them was aptly stated recently in an article in "Fortune", the U.S. business magazine, which declared:-

"In the long run it costs the nation less to build adequate housing than to let people live in slums. Private capital cannot erect adequate housing for lower income groups and make money; therefore the rest of the nation must fork over the difference between what the poorest can pay and what adequate housing really costs."

If there was some justification for the failure of Victorian Governments to take action during the war and the immediate post-war years, it has long since disappeared. If there had been any real intention on the part of Governments over the past four years to really tackle slum problems, this State would have a slum reclamation programme and would be actively carrying it out, stage by stage.

But there is no programme worthy of the name - only clear evidence that the present Government, like its predecessors, is prepared to tinker with the slums in order to give the appearance that it is effectively dealing with the issue.

A Plan For Reclamation

Set out below is a series of concrete proposals which together form the basis for a positive slum reclamation policy. The Brotherhood is publishing these proposals in order to gain public support for them and will campaign for their adoption until there is clear evidence that they have been made an integral part of this State's housing programme,

1. That this year and every year for at least the next four years a sum of not less than £500,000 be set aside in the State Budget as a grant to cover certain expenditures on slum reclamation. The grant to be made to the Housing Commission which is to be instructed that the money is to be spent solely on slum reclamation.

2. That every year for at least the next four years not less than one-sixth of the money now received by the Housing Commission from the Commonwealth Government under the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement, be set aside and used solely for the re-housing of slum dwellers.

3. That a special department of slum reclamation be established in the Housing Commission to carry out the slum reclamation programme and that it be instructed to adopt modern slum reclamation techniques similar to those that have been developed overseas, including the use of trained social workers and housing officers.

4. That this be accepted as a minimum slum reclamation programme and that the whole housing programme of the State be reviewed annually with a view to increasing from time to time the allocation for slum reclamation work.

Realistic

The first thing that will strike you about this programme is its realism. It is not only economically practical, but it is also politically practical. The Brotherhood is not demanding an ambitious slum reclamation scheme that would unduly disturb the conventional housing programme that the Housing Commission is now carrying out. It merely gives slum reclamation a modest place in the overall housing programme if the State, to start off with, and envisages a gradual increase in expenditure on slum reclamation as the initial programme can be expanded.

On the economic side the State Government is being asked to find a minimum of £500,000 a year for slum reclamation. This is equal to 1/200th of the last State Budget of £100

million. In view of the acknowledgment on all sides of the importance of slum reclamation, is that an excessive demand?

The Housing Commission is being asked to set aside one-sixth of the loan money it receives from the Commonwealth Government each year. This financial year the Commission received £12 millions so that £2 millions of this would have gone into slum reclamation. No one would claim that this was an excessive proportion to go to slum reclamation.

Currently the Housing Commission says that there are only 7,000 families on its books waiting for homes. At most, this would represent 28,000 people. In slum houses we know that there are more than 35,000 people who, in the public as well as their own interest, ought to be given new homes. Is it too much to ask that the 35,000 should be given 1/6th of the State's allocation for homes if the remaining 5/6ths are to be spent for the benefit of the 28,000?

The Political Aspect

Even from the political standpoint this programme should be acceptable. If there is political advantage in building housing estates in Melbourne's outer suburbs this advantage can hardly be undermined by the modest allocation of 1/6th of Housing Commission funds to the re-development of inner areas. Indeed the political advantages of setting aside a definite sum for slum reclamation are not to be undervalued.

Slum reclamation has been talked about for 17 years. The Government that initiates a modest slum reclamation programme such as has been suggested here, would certainly not lose any votes and stands a very good chance of positively gaining the support of many electors.

Finance

There are two very cogent reasons why the State Government should make a contribution from its funds to the slum reclamation programme.

One is that since it is a Victorian programme at least part of the funds should be provided from Victorian funds. We can't expect all the money for reclaiming our slums to be provided by the Commonwealth, but as a State, must accept some of the financial responsibility.

The second is that under existing circumstances it is impossible to rely solely on Commonwealth finance because under the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement there is

no provision for paying compensation to slum house owners whose land will have to be acquired, or for paying for the other preliminaries which are an essential part of slum reclamation. If there is no money specifically provided to pay for these expenses, then the programme will be a failure before it starts.

Review of the housing programme every year is of the greatest importance. The minimum allocations suggested in these proposals should be increased as soon as possible.

Slum Reclamation Department

The Brotherhood's proposal for the establishment of a department of slum reclamation within the Housing Commission is a vital element in the programme suggested.

Slum reclamation calls for an entirely different approach to that necessary in planning and carrying out a housing programme such as the Commission is now implementing.

The effectiveness of a slum reclamation policy, unlike that of a conventional housing programme, is not measured by the number of houses constructed, but by the number of slum hovels that are actually demolished or made habitable. It is not a matter of moving existing families from slums and allowing slum dwellings to be occupied by other families, but of actually destroying condemned houses and replanning whole areas to provide all the facilities for healthy living.

The Human Problems

Reclaiming slums involves the re-housing of families who are not necessarily demanding new homes, but who in their own and the public interest, should be re-housed.

To ensure their acceptance and co-operation in the re-housing project, they have to accept the idea that it will be in their real interests and that their personal problems will not be overlooked. You cannot persuade people by issuing incomprehensible legal orders, but you can gain their co-operation by handling them as human beings and winning their confidence.

This is specialised work which can only be carried out effectively by trained and selected people. Trained social workers and housing officers would be key personnel in the "Slum Reclamation Department".

Out Of Touch

The extent to which the present Commission is out of touch with modern methods was revealed in December, 1952, when it was ordered by the Government to start a pocket handkerchief slum reclamation project in Fitzroy. Without any prior explanation of what it was doing the Commission served notices to quit on the occupants of the houses it was intending to demolish. The occupants did not know where they were to be transferred to, whether it was intended to re-house them eventually in the area in which they had been living, how much rent they would have to pay in their new homes or whether they were entitled to any compensation.

The hostility that this extremely unimaginative approach created at the outset was the main reason for the long and costly delays that have occurred in this small-scale project which is still far from completion.

To make the Commission responsible for the slum reclamation programme without first introducing new blood and new leadership would seem to be most unwise.

The Brotherhood envisages the new slum reclamation department of the Commission being under the direction of an experienced and imaginative administrator who really believes in slum reclamation. He would have equal status with the Commission's chairman and would have direct access to the Minister.

He would be assisted by a staff of experts including social workers, architects, surveyors, and legal advisers as well as clerical staff. The bulk of his assistants, other than the social workers, could be obtained from existing Commission staff, so the new department would not involve a great increase in the total number of the Commission staff.

Slum Prevention

Another important function of the Reclamation Department would be slum prevention.

The Commission now has full powers to issue and enforce repair orders on houses which are structurally sound but dilapidated, or lacking in adequate facilities. Today there are some 4,000 outstanding repair orders and there is no valid reason why they should not be enforced as there is no longer a shortage of materials or labour.

It is imperative that this form of slum prevention be vigorously carried out or housing which still has many years of useful life will rapidly deteriorate to the stage where it is only fit for demolition.



FAULTS IN HOUSING ADMINISTRATION

IT HAS BEEN ARGUED in the previous chapter that the Commission should devote a fixed portion of its funds to slum reclamation because people in slum areas are suffering the greatest hardship.

In this chapter we deal with the other side of the Commission's programme - the conventional housing programme and its present administration and other shortcomings of Commonwealth and State housing policy.

Since the war the Commission has not been able to keep pace with the demands that have been made on it for houses by people who, while not necessarily living in slums, are nevertheless incapable of providing adequate accommodation for themselves without the Commission's assistance.

Allotting Houses

This situation has forced the Commission into establishing machinery by which it could determine priorities.

It has given priority to ex-servicemen, which is undoubtedly a priority that the community accepts.

Next it has said that families with five or more children shall be treated as a separate problem from smaller families since they will need larger homes than the standard Commission types. Roughly twenty per cent. of the Commission's homes are made available for residents of emergency housing camps.

Finally, the Commission has declared that all other categories of families, irrespective of the relative urgency of their need for a home, shall be treated as one group. They shall be obliged to enter a ballot. And if they fail to draw a lucky number they must wait for the next ballot. Furthermore the Commission has so arranged its machinery that even if a family draws a lucky number in the ballot it has no guarantee that a house will be made available to it. Having won a ballot the family has to face up to an investigation to decide whether it comes within the scope of the Commission's rules of eligibility or not.

If, as a result of the investigation the Commission decides that the family is ineligible under its rules, then the family, although it has won a place in the ballot, does not get a home.

Housing ballots are no longer conducted in public, but the right to a State home still depends on a "lucky number".

Unjust In Practice

Objections to the ballot system are based on the argument that this system is grossly unjust in practice.

The urgency of a family's need for a Commission house can only be measured in terms of the size of the family in relation to its present accommodation, the condition of its present dwelling and the amount of income which its members can jointly afford to pay in rent.

It is obvious under the ballot system that there can be no proper assessment of need before priorities are decided. No matter how severe a family's hardship might be and no matter how extreme its need, its claim to a house is not even given consideration until it has been successful in a ballot.

In practice this means that many families living with in-laws, living in one or two rooms or paying high rents, see others who are better housed granted Commission homes over their heads simply because they were lucky in the ballot.

How Ballot System Operates

A four room house in South Melbourne now houses three families consisting of 11 people. The acute overcrowding has been caused by the original tenant, Mr. G, taking in his brother's and sister's families when their house was burned down.

Because of the severe congestion, Mr. G's wife has been obliged to move to her mother's house with her baby. She cannot return until the in-laws move out and they in turn cannot find new accommodation for themselves.

In August last, Mrs. N, Mr. G's sister, applied for a Commission home. She heard nothing for three months and was then told that she would have to wait for six months from the date of application before being placed in the ballot. If successful in the ballot, her eligibility for a home would be considered.

Here is a case from Armadale.

Mr. M, who has a wife, three children and a mother aged 85, first applied for a Commission home in 1950.

A year later he found a caretaking job with accommodation provided so withdrew his application with the Commission as he felt it would be unfair to deprive someone else of a home when he was satisfactorily housed.

In July 1952, the job ended and Mr. M reapplied for a Commission home. At the time he was living in one room in Armadale with his wife and two children. The eldest boy was boarding as there was no room for him in the household and the grandmother was in a convalescent home.

Mr M was told that his name would be included in the ballot. He waited and was not successful. A member of Parliament who had written to the Commission urging that Mr. M's housing conditions should be investigated received this letter from the Chairman of the Commission:-

"... you were kind enough in October, 1952 to make further representation on his behalf and as a result the Commission decided to give him the opportunity of making a further application ... unfortunately we are not able to do anything for him unless he is successful in one of these ballots.

"We are having a ballot in about two weeks' time, and while I cannot promise success, I hope that success in it will enable us to investigate his claims. Unfortunately we cannot do anything for him unless he is successful in the ballot."

This case shows how rigidly the ballot system is adhered to. Good fortune in the ballot is the supreme and overriding consideration in the allotting of the State's homes.

No Justification

There is no more justification for allotting homes by ballot than there is for allotting hospital beds by ballot.

Houses, like any other fundamental need for which the community has accepted responsibility, should be allotted according to need. The ballot system, which was introduced after the war as the simplest and fairest method of dealing with the overwhelming numbers of homeless people suffering the same general degree of hardship, has now become unjust in principle and unfair in practice. Today it is causing hostility and bitterness.

A Fair Method

The Commonwealth Housing Commission in 1945 stated:-

"Discharged personnel and persons at present living in dwellings which are seriously overcrowded or unfit for human habitation have a strong claim to be allotted good standard housing. Special provision should be made for these groups in a Government housing programme."

The Commission recommended that a points priority system should operate. Points should be allotted on such claims as-

- (a) war service; (d) bad housing conditions;
- (b) family size; (e) high present rent.
- (c) income;

Recommendations: *The ballot is now causing grave tnlustlce. If there was some justification for its application in the early post-war years, the justification has long since vanished.*

The system should be changed and in its place a fair system based on need should be introduced.

The points system recommended by the Commonwealth Housing Commission appears to be the fairest and simplest method. There is no reason why it should not now be accepted by the Victorian Housing Commission.

No Reasons For Rejection

If the Commission's ballot system is unjust, its method of dealing with those families that it declares to be ineligible for a Commission home borders on the inhuman.

The Commission's attitude is that it determines eligibility according to its own undisclosed rules. Having made the determination it keeps the reasons to itself. Indeed it often makes a feature of telling rejected families that the reasons for their rejection will not be disclosed.

A narrow fronted four-room house in Fitzroy is "home" to a husband, wife and three children. The walls and ceilings in all rooms are leaklllg and rotten. Water drips down on one bed.

Two years ago the family was successful in a Housing Commission ballot. It was visited by a Commission inspector who said that the family would be given a flat at Ascot Vale. Shortly afterwards the family received a letter from the Chairman of the Commission informing it that its application had been rejected. No reason was given.

To this day the family does not know why it was denied a new home.

Mr. A is a widower who works hard to keep a home together for four children. The "home" consists of three rooms into which water seeps from the floor and drips from the ceiling. The kitchen has been painted recently by the tenant,

but he says "it's no use painting or doing up the rest of the house as the walls are too wet."

At the end of 1952 the family was excited to hear that it had won the right to a new home in the housing ballot. A Commission inspector visited the house and "made a fuss about some scribbling on the walls."

Shortly afterwards, a letter arrived from the Commission saying that the application had been rejected.

Again, no reason was given and the applicant assumes that a child's scribbling on the walls has deprived the family of its right to a new Commission home.

The case of Mrs. A is further evidence of the injustice of this practice of rejecting without giving reasons.

In March 1952, Mrs. A, her invalid husband and seven children were sleeping in the one dry bedroom of a sub-standard house. They applied for a Commission house and were rejected.

On seeking the reasons for the rejection, Mrs. A received this letter from the Commission:-

"... after full consideration of all aspects of your case your application was rejected. The Commission is not prepared to vary this decision regarding your case. ... I desire to inform you that it is not the practice of the Commission to give detailed reasons for declining an application for a house."

In October, 1953 Mrs. A applied again and received a letter in a similar vein, refusing to give any reason for the rejection of her application.

A welfare agency concerned at the appalling conditions under which the family was living, wrote asking if the Commission would reveal to the agency the grounds on which Mrs. A's application had been rejected twice, so that the agency might assist Mrs. A and her family to become acceptable to the Commission. The agency received no reply.

Shortly afterwards, Mrs. A was summoned to the Commission office for an interview and subsequently told that she would be allotted a reconditioned house on an older Commission estate when one became available.

Three weeks later she received a letter to say that her application had again been rejected.

It appears that the only grounds on which Mrs. A was refused a house were that, with an invalid husband and seven children, the family was obviously unable to pay the current "economic" rents of Commission homes.

Mrs. A, her invalid husband and seven children continue to sleep in one bedroom and the Housing Commission sees no reason why it should have explained to them why they have been unacceptable as Commission tenants for the past two years.

1,000 Rejections

Over 1,000 persons who have been successful in housing ballots have been rejected by the Commission after investigation.

Applicants apparently may be rejected because of bad rent records, because there is evidence of failure to maintain their present homes in good repair, because of previous court convictions, because the marriage is "de facto", or because the family is considered to be financially capable of solving its own housing problem.

There is evidence to suggest that applicants may be rejected because the Commission considers they may be troublesome tenants, or because the family is so large that it may lack the means of paying economic rentals.

Other cases suggest that a family may even be rejected because it lives in a house that was a slum a generation before the family was forced to occupy it.

No one would suggest that every family applying for a Commission home should automatically be granted one, or that all applicants are capable of fulfilling their responsibilities as tenants.

On the other hand there is no justification whatsoever for refusing to tell rejected applicants why they are not eligible.

Unable To Qualify

If the Commission is not prepared to assist rejected families to improve themselves so that they may qualify for Commission homes, it should at least give them the opportunity of making their own efforts towards improvement by telling them why they were refused a home.

Failure to do this amounts to a life sentence to inadequate housing for some families, with no opportunity of becoming eligible for adequate housing.

Recommendation: In all cases reasons for rejections should be given and the family told in what ways it can make itself eligible for a Commission home.

Unwarrantable Interference

Some applicants are refused houses for reasons which militate against the best interests of a family or are unwarrantable interference in the domestic life of tenants.

A woman with three children, separated from her husband, was told by the Commission to obtain a divorce because her husband might return and cause trouble in the home. There was already a court order for the maintenance of the wife and children, so their financial position was reasonably secure.

A married couple who had cared for their grandchildren from birth was told that the children must be legally adopted by the grandparents before they would be eligible for a house.

The children, illegitimate, belonged to a daughter who had later married and was living permanently out of the house.

Cases where there is some doubt as to the stability of the family or the number of persons who may occupy the house certainly need careful investigation, but where the stability of the family unit seems reasonably assured there appears to be no reason why the Commission should go to such lengths to interfere in the domestic lives of private citizens.

Some families complain of being dealt with in a high-handed and inhumane manner and claim that those who do not fulfil the letter of the law are penalised.

e.g. A family left Watsonia to take a job with accommodation in the country. They had been on the Commission's waiting list for three years.

They received a letter from the Commission which had been sent to Watsonia but was not re-delivered to their new address for two weeks. The letter notified them that a Commission home was available. The husband immediately came to Melbourne. He was told that because of the delay he had lost the house and would have to take his position on the waiting list as a new applicant and fill in new forms.

His job in the country finished and he and his family were forced to find accommodation at Camp Pell where they are still living.

Bad Handling

Here is another example of bad handling of a difficult case.

While a woman who had been deserted by her husband was waiting for the widow's pension, the Housing Commission tried to eject her and her children. A welfare agency pleaded for a reduction in the current rent but the Commission refused to grant it.

Only when the agency agreed to pay half the outstanding rent of £100 did the Commission agree to allow the family to remain in the house at a reduced rent.

Why should a charitable agency be obliged to help pay a debt owing to a Government Department? What would have happened to the mother and children but for the agency?

Why did the Commission allow the case to drift for so long?

Over 250 families have been evicted from Housing Commission houses. The evidence suggests that in many cases this drastic action could have been averted by sympathetic handling when the family's problems first began to grow.

Some of the Commission's staff are doing a fine job of meeting applicants and tenants on a fair basis, but the ultimate decisions, made at a higher level, seem to be dictated by a desire to secure the recovery of money spent rather than out of consideration for the welfare of the families involved.

Recommendations: Social workers should be employed by the Commission to handle the human problems and to interpret these problems to the clerks and heads of the administrative division who must now gain their information largely from files.

This would prevent many situations from developing which are harmful to the families concerned, the Commission and the community.

Influence

A disturbing feature of the general handling of applicants for Commission homes is the advisability, or even, necessity, for applicants to get someone of influence to take up their case if they want action or redress.

This necessity is recognised and admitted by some employees of the Commission.

It is borne out by cases where people have contacted the Minister for Housing, a Councillor or Member of Parlia-

ment to intercede on their behalf. Immediate action has generally resulted in cases which had previously appeared hopeless.

The family living in South Melbourne referred to above, was advised by a Commission staff member to get someone in authority to intercede on its behalf as "they'll take no notice if you are just by yourself". As a result of action taken by a member of Parliament the family was told that it would be admitted to the next ballot.

The Commission's letter ran:

"Respecting representations made to the Minister for Housing ... your application will be re-investigated by a special committee."

How is it that careful and adequate consideration had not been given before?

A number of similar cases are known to the Brotherhood. It is right and proper that members of parliament, councillors and Ministers should make representation when apparent injustices are brought to their notice, but these incidents would not arise if thorough investigations of claims were made in the first instance by the Commission.

Recommendations: It is recommended that thorough investigations should be carried out by the Commission when applications are first made for homes and that appeals be investigated thoroughly so that cases are judged on their merit and not because some outside person of authority has made representation.

Housing and Migrants

In 1945 when the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement came into operation there were no migrants entering the country.

In the past nine years 170,000 non-British migrants have settled in Victoria yet there is still no place for them in our housing programme. They are not eligible for Housing Commission homes and there is no State or Commonwealth authority to assist them with their housing problems.

The result is that large numbers of New Australians are drifting to inner suburbs in search of low rental housing. Many, through sheer necessity, are crowding into small and ancient sub-standard houses. They are housing outcasts forced to occupy the sub-standard housing which abounds in the inner suburbs.

In Melbourne, many New Australians are being exploited by unscrupulous landlords and agents. Six cases of the sale of condemned property at exorbitant prices to New Australians have been noted by the Brotherhood in the past few months. The evidence suggests that there is a considerable traffic in selling and letting condemned houses to migrants who are unfamiliar with property values and have no knowledge of the implications of repair and demolition orders.

Some owners of slum property who see a possibility of their land being resumed by the Housing Commission, are unloading their housing junk at exorbitant prices on to New Australians.

Cases of slum cottages changing hands for £750 and £1,000 have been noted and some New Australians are paying rents of £3 to £4 a week for "furnished" and unfurnished slum hovels.

Migrants who pay high prices for sub-standard housing naturally believe that they have acquired some asset for their money. They do not realise that in actual fact if the dwelling has at some time been condemned by the Housing Commission as unfit for human habitation, they will not receive a penny compensation for the dwelling should the land be resumed by the Housing Commission.

Recommendations:

1. A house that has been condemned by the Housing Commission as unfit for human habitation and has been ordered to be repaired or demolished is virtually the Commission's responsibility. To prevent exploitation of prospective purchasers, particularly New Australians, the Commission should prevent, or at least control, the sale of condemned property.

2. Provision must be made in our Commonwealth-financed, State housing programme for housing the ever-increasing number of migrants.

Rents, Rebates and Large Families

The rentals charged by the Housing Commission are economic rents based on a formula which includes the capital cost of construction, roads, sewerage, interest and sinking fund payments, maintenance, rates and taxes, insurance and administration.

However, to ensure that low income families have some opportunity of renting State home a rebate system operates so that the rents charged will approximate one fifth of the

family income. The rebate is assessed on the income of the family in relation to the basic wage. If the family income of the tenant is equal to the basic wage then the rebate allowed on the economic rent brings the rent down to one-fifth of the family income. If the family income exceeds that basic wage, the rebate which would have been granted If the family income had been equal to the basic wage, is decreased by one-third of the amount by which the family income exceeds the basic wage.

Family Income

In assessing the family income the whole weekly income of the highest earning member of the family is included, plus a portion of the income of other wage earners in the family.

No allowance is made for taxation, other statutory payments or superannuation. No allowance is made for time payments on furniture which most low income families must burden themselves with when moving into a new and larger home.

In assessing the rebate no account is taken of the number of children in the family. A family with an income of £13 a week and eight mouths to feed, can only be granted the same rebate as a family on £13 a week which has only three mouths to feed. Large families are therefore heavily penalised under the present rebate system.

The result is that many low income families, in great need of adequate housing are refraining from applying for Commission homes. They know that Commission rents range from £3/5/- to £3/17/6 a week, which is beyond their capacity. Even when the rebate system is explained to them, large families are still unable to accept the Commission's rents. Generally the only way in which the Commission meets their needs is to tell them to wait until a large house in an old estate, where rents are lower, becomes available.

Recommendations:

1. More homes for families with five or more children should be constructed by the Commission.

2. To make it possible for large families with low incomes to obtain good housing at a rent they can afford the present rebate system should be drastically overhauled to take into account the size of the family as well as the family's income. as is done in Sweden, the U.S.A. and England.



"NOTORIOUS" CAMP PELL

CAMP PELL IS A PLACE OF CONTRASTS. As one tenant remarked: "There are good and bad, the same as Toorak."

Most huts at Camp Pell house three families with sub-standard yard space for each, fenced according to the availability of timber scraps. Living rooms are generally of good size and even spacious in some cases.

Huts are draughty and in many rain leaks through nail holes in the roof. The wind blows through the raised flooring and in some huts lifts the linoleum on a windy day. Heating is provided by an iron, drum type heater in the living room and, by regulation, sawdust is the only fuel permitted.

Most residents can use the heaters for only a few hours a day, because of the high cost of fuel. The heaters generate great heat for the first half hour and then gradually fade out. In winter clothes are dried in living rooms which become damp and steamy. The heaters are dangerous to children as there is nothing to indicate whether they are alive or not.

Most mothers complain that children have constant colds. Bronchitis and pneumonia are prevalent.

There is no gas. Cooking is done in small electric stoves which are quite inadequate for large families. One woman remarked, "I have to cook my dinner in relays, starting at about 2 p.m." Electricity bills are high, ranging up to £11 a month with an average of £4. Some families may be uneconomical, but for most the electricity bill is greatly in excess of what families are paying in other parts of Melbourne. Tenants claim that this is due to faulty wiring.

Inadequate For Large Families

Facilities in huts for large families are most inadequate and most of these families (with 5 to 12 children) are living in unhealthy and undesirable congestion. There appears to be no reason why they should not be permitted to occupy two units for the same rent as one - 25/- per week.

Seasonal hazards are mud in winter and dust in summer. Parents complain of lack of private playing space and say that they cannot bring their children up decently when they are mixing with some children and adults who are aggressive, quarrelsome and use foul language. Some yards are separated by palings less than three feet high. Flies swarm from some yards and neighbours have no redress.

The Baby Health Centre provides a playground for younger children but there is little provision for older boys and girls who mooch around with few opportunities for constructive leisure time activities.

After five years' negotiations with the State Accommodation Office, a hut has been made available for the Playgrounds Association.

Wives say that the men have too much time on their hands and no interests. They cannot have a garden, and so, many spend as much time as possible away from the Camp, often drinking.

Frustrated

One woman spoke of the danger of her marriage breaking up because her husband is frustrated and unhappy. The meaningless of life at Camp Pell was accentuated by a brief period of caretaking at the "boss's place". The husband was quite content working in the garden and appreciated the peaceful atmosphere of a normal home. The wife hopes that they can get out of the camp before the marriage breaks. Many of the women admit that they themselves have become disheartened in the atmosphere of the camp and have become lax, slovenly and "can't be bothered".

This is a brief picture of present-day conditions at Camp Pell, the now almost notorious Camp Pell, formed in 1946 as a temporary measure to house evicted families, but which in 1954 still accommodates some 550 families.

The picture and what follows is based on the findings of a social worker of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence who spent two weeks in the camp. She met many families, carefully interviewed 20, and observed at first hand how people at the Camp lived.

Dangerous

Camp Pell constitutes one of the most serious aspects of our whole housing programme in Victoria. Originally an emergency measure it now threatens to become a permanent feature of the housing picture of this State - a government sponsored slum where through lack of official appreciation of the human problems of housing, the Government is gradually allowing many of Melbourne's problem families to congregate to the detriment of other families forced to live there.

The time has come when the dangerous drift at Camp Pell must be tackled. The Government must evolve a policy that will systematically and quickly reduce the number of families until eventually the camp can be closed. This is a top priority of the State's housing programme.

Who Lives There?

Families at Camp Pell fall into four groups.

1. Those of good or high standard of living who seem to have been forgotten or else cannot qualify for a Commission house because of some regulation or convention such as a past conviction.

These people live in dread of the effect upon their children of inferior living conditions and the proximity of poor type families - a situation forced upon them over which they have no control. In some cases, because they try to keep to themselves or show that they resent foul language, excessive drinking and noisy quarrels, they are actively disliked by their neighbours.

The sexual immorality of some older children who interfere with the younger ones and teach them bad habits, is also a source of worry to many parents.

The J family is typical of those in Group 1. There are four children under nine and the family has been living in Camp Pell for four years. Previously the family, with Police assistance, had moved from South Melbourne to Watsonia because there were criminal elements living in the same apartment house.

The first application to the Housing Commission was made soon after the parents were married. When at Watsonia, they applied again and were told that they "did not have enough furniture". After two years at Camp Pell they were called for their first interview by the Commission. They were advised that the Commission was unable to provide a house.

In June, 1953, they appeared before the Emergency Housing Review Board and it was "discovered" that Mr. J was a returned serviceman and should not have had to wait. They were advised that it would be recommended that they be moved immediately. Mr. J told the Board that he would be willing to pay £3/17/6 rent.

Nothing further has been heard from the Housing Commission or the Review Board.

The interviewer was impressed by the family and the house, and there is no apparent reason for the long embittering delay in allotting them a house.

Mr. and Mrs. H, another Group 1 family, have lived at Camp Pell for 18 months after three years in residence at Watsonia. When first evicted nearly 4½ years ago they applied for a Commission home and were told to go to Watsonia for six months and they would be given a Commission home. At Watsonia they "were left for dead".

The family made bitter remarks about the attitude of the State Accommodation Office. Eventually their hut at Watsonia was inspected and their application for a Commission home rejected, no reason being given.

The family has not been called before the Review Board and has heard nothing about its housing future. The family appears to be of good standard, but has become embittered by the casual treatment it has received.

2. Non-criminal but poor standards. These families have deteriorated after long periods in emergency housing camps. They feel that to look forward to something better is unrealistic. They say there is nothing at Camp Pell to make them house-proud and, wrongly but understandably, believe that it is not worth while trying to keep their huts clean and neat. They feel that the general public thinks that Camp Pell residents are no good anyway. At the same time they will tell you how they long for a garden, a decent house and privacy.

Typical of Group 2 are the E's who have seven children all under 16. Their housing history shows that after 12 years in a house they were evicted. Following a short period in Watsonia, they went to Camp Pell and have been there for 3½ years. Mr. E. applied for a Commission home when they were first evicted but heard nothing regarding his application. He has not applied again and no one has suggested that he should. The family has not been called before the Review Board.

This seems to be a sub-standard family that has apparently deteriorated after years in emergency housing camps.

3. Low standard. This group are again non-criminal but their living standards are very low. They are distinguished from Group 2 by a lack of realisation of their situation and its effects upon their children. If they have any awareness they are overwhelmed by their situation and do not know how, or where they can begin to make improvement.

Their history of substandard living probably goes back more than one generation. They could be termed "slum-minded" or "problem" families. They would in most cases respond to sympathetic encouragement and "know how" to raise their standards, particularly if they felt they had something to look forward to.

4. Anti-Social. These are the small proportion of families whose moral standards are low, who are anti-social and vicious. They present the greatest problem because they tend to organise their crime amongst each other in the camp and adversely affect the good families living around them.

They are a menace particularly to the youth of the camp. They are foul-mouthed, sneering and defiant and create fear among other inhabitants.

Hostility To Office

Common to all groups is an attitude of open hostility to the State Accommodation Office, which is the administrative authority for the camp. So consistent are the complaints that are made by all groups about the Accommodation Office that the claims simply cannot be pushed aside as being of no consequence.

Residents say that they are constantly being made to feel that they have no rights and can be told just what they shall and shall not do. They declare that their reasonable requests for information about their housing future are met with rude rebuffs. They have even been sworn at.

So unsatisfactory from the residents' point of view has their relationship with the State Accommodation Office become that they have been advised by sympathetic officials of the office itself to approach the Minister for Housing directly if they really want to get a fair hearing.

In many cases where this advice has been followed the families concerned have been granted requests that had previously been refused by the Accommodation Office.

The Accommodation Office's attitude towards some families has been such that it has built up their feeling of hopelessness and this undoubtedly has accelerated their deterioration.

There is no criticism of the caretakers at Camp Pell and when the difficulties and annoyances under which they work are appreciated, this amounts to high praise.

Action Is Needed

From the facts revealed here it is obvious that there are a number of fundamental weaknesses in present Government policy on Camp Pell and that unless these weaknesses are promptly removed a very serious situation could arise. Camp Pell started as a social service. It is in danger of becoming a social disease the full effects of which will not be felt until the child products of the camp grow to adolescence and adulthood.

What is needed is a clear plan that will ensure that those families who are eligible for Housing Commission homes obtain them in the shortest possible time and that those who now fall below the standards required by the Commission should be helped to improve themselves so that they will eventually become eligible.

Any other approach to the problem of Camp Pell would be completely unrealistic. The Government has, through force of circumstances been obliged to create emergency housing camps; it cannot at this stage side-step its responsibility to implement a positive plan for their abolition.

A Way To Clear Camp Pell

These are the steps that should be taken:-

1. The Review Board appointed by the Minister to review the eligibility of families now in camps should be instructed to thoroughly investigate all families at Camp Pell and classify them for eligibility for Commission homes. The investigation must be more than a rough appraisal of files. The Board should acquaint itself on the spot with the situation of each family, either by attending the camp or using the services of an independent social worker.

2. The Housing Commission should be instructed to accept the recommendations of the Review Board and make available at least 40 per cent. of Housing Commission homes to the eligible families. This would be in line with the present Government's declared policy of giving top priority to the abolition of emergency camps - a policy which seems to have been reversed following the announcement by the Minister last December that only 20 per cent. of Commission homes would be allotted to emergency camp residents.

3. A team of welfare workers, preferably trained social workers, should be appointed to Camp Pell as part of the permanent staff. Their job would be to give full time, on-the-spot advice and assistance to families with the object of lifting them to a level where they would become eligible for Commission homes. Among other things these officers would help mothers in the camp improve their standard of housewifery, child care and hygiene. They would do this first by winning the friendship and co-operation of the families and would act as liaison officers between the residents and the housing authorities.

4. The Accommodation Office should be abolished as a separate entity and its functions and necessary staff transferred to Housing Commission control. This would bring emergency camps completely into the housing sphere where they properly belong and would ensure that the Commission would have them fully integrated into their housing programme.

5. A scheme for the rehabilitation of the really difficult problem families should be drawn up by voluntary welfare agencies with the co-operation of the Government housing authorities. The scheme would be based on the techniques used overseas and would be designed through patient experiment to evolve methods of helping those families now regarded as incorrigibles:



PROBLEM

FAMILIES

"If the nation is seriously concerned with abolishing slums it will no longer be able to avoid facing the problem of subnormal families. As the economic level of the poorer classes is raised and their standard of welfare improved, the problem families stand out more clearly as a minority who do not benefit from improved conditions, but remain a menace to themselves and society."

B. SEERBOHM ROWNTREE.

IN EVERY ASPECT of housing that we have examined we have been confronted with the problem of incorrigible families - the submerged section of the community who are not eligible for new housing.

They have emerged as a serious obstacle to progress with our housing programme. Through ignorance of what they are and how they might be assisted, we have unconsciously come to regard them as an insuperable obstacle.

We know that in slum reclamation we will find that five to eight per cent. of the families are "problems", and as such cannot qualify immediately for re-housing.

In emergency housing camps the proportion is higher and the "problems" remain behind while other families move to Commission homes.

We know, too, that 250 families have been evicted from Housing Commission houses and a considerable number of them would also be classified as "problem" families.

Nobody's Business

Today they are nobody's business. If they have been evicted from privately owned houses, they are housed in emergency housing camps where they linger on indefinitely.

If they have been evicted from Housing Commission homes they are not eligible for emergency housing and in many cases drift back to slum pockets.

If they are involved in a slum reclamation project they may be housed in emergency housing camps or evicted and left to find their own accommodation in an adjoining slum.

One Melbourne family is costing the State more than £20 a week to maintain. The husband is in gaol, the wife on social service benefits and three of the children are wards of the State.

Characteristics

In England a report by the Pacifist Service Units, now known as Family Service Units, listed certain characteristics which can be distinguished in most, if not all, problem families.

1. *Low income.*
2. *Chronic ill-health which causes intermittent employment.*
3. *Mismanagement of financial and domestic affairs.*
4. *Arrears in rent.*
5. *Irresponsibility towards debts.*
6. *Wastage of money on "luxuries" while members of family are deprived of necessities such as food and clothing.*
7. *Bad housing.*

"... their low standards are passed on from generation to generation, not so much through heredity, though often the least fit, mentally and physically, are the most prolific, but mainly because their children are stunted by neglect and handicapped by an atrocious upbringing. Housing, health, education, and social security services must not allow these families to slip through their fingers as they do at present, and new improved services must be devised to meet their needs.

Segregation

Two methods have been tried to rehabilitate problem families. One is to build "de-canting" settlements where such families are concentrated and where they may or may not be assisted to raise their living standards.

The Society of Housing Managers in England has stated that "it wholly disapproves of a policy of segregation. The Society thinks that there is no case for providing the low standard tenant with inferior design and equipment. The low standard tenant is easily discouraged by difficulties. What is necessary for the good tenant is more so for the bad one, since the former will at all times make the best of a bad job, while the latter will give up the unequal struggle at an early stage."

Rehabilitation

The second method is to tackle problem families in their own accustomed environment, to assist them so that they will desire to, and will qualify for admission to new homes.

The first step is to buy structurally sound houses in inner suburbs and put them into habitable condition with adequate living space, cooking, play, laundry and bath facilities. Rent is fixed on the tenant's income rather than the property value, on condition that the tenant conforms to standards of house cleanliness and maintains rent payments. A regular portion of the rent will be set aside for future improvement thus giving the tenant an incentive to improve his circumstances.

A social worker becomes in effect the landlord and the success of the whole project depends on relations between the social worker and family.

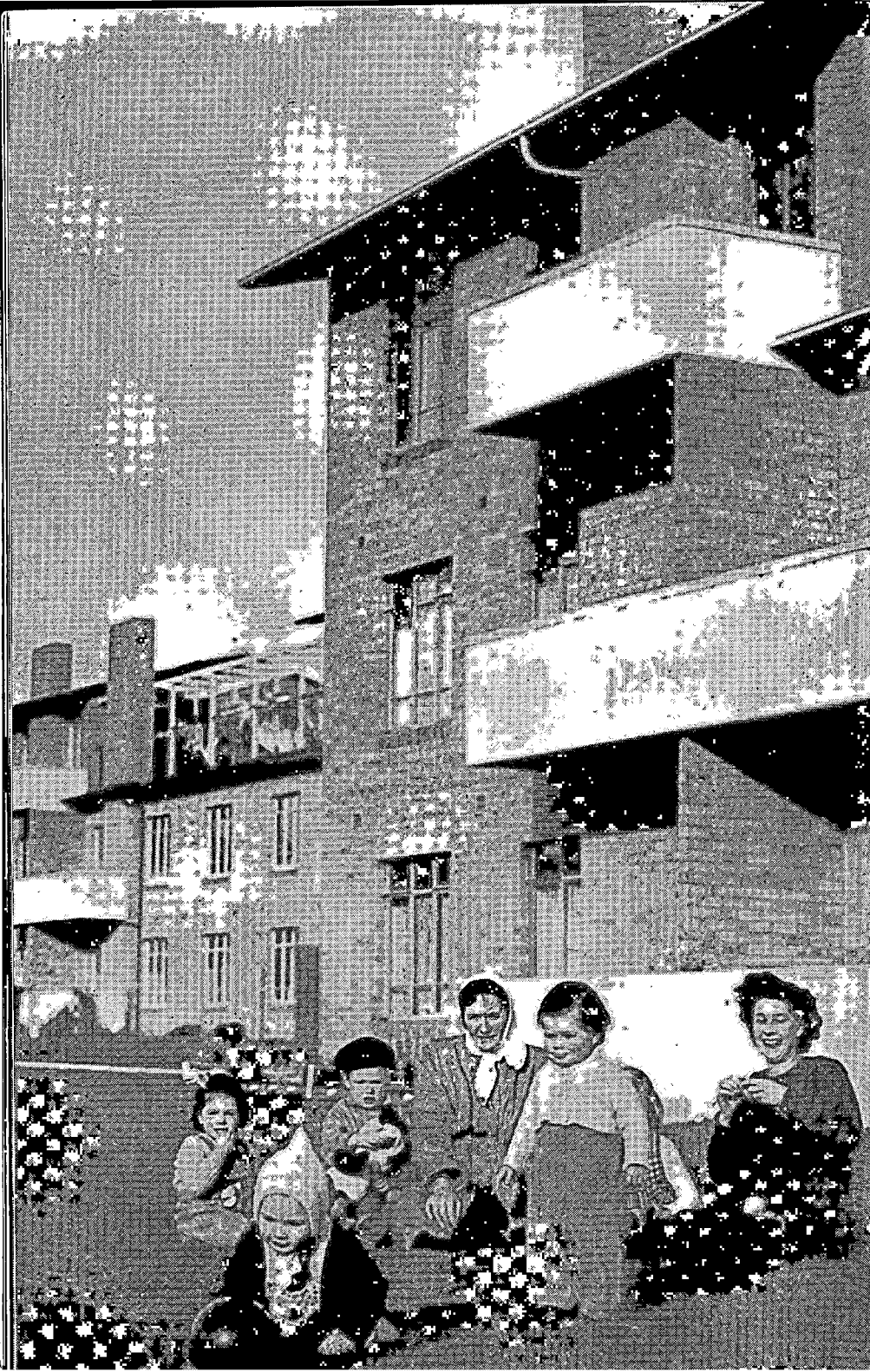
The "landlord" takes an active interest in the welfare of the whole family, and fosters improvements in domestic management, child care and the use of leisure.

Stated thus the plan may appear to be "dictatorial" but the basis on which the scheme is built must be one of friendly, sympathetic understanding and handling which is the principle underlying all sound family case work.

As every social worker knows, and as the collection of data for this survey has shown, no family however big its problems, is utterly hopeless.

A plan, such as the one outlined above, was envisaged by the Brotherhood of St. Laurence in 1945 when it launched an appeal for £20,000 to commence a problem family housing scheme. Through lack of support and trained staff, the plan had to be temporarily shelved. However in the near future it is hoped that it will be possible to devote the £9,000 held in a housing trust fund to financing a problem family project.

No housing programme can be complete if a small minority of the community is continually ignored because it presents difficulties. They must be re-educated to general standards, so that they can take their place with other families in decent homes and their re-education can best be undertaken by voluntary social service agencies with the co-operation of Government housing authorities.



WE NEED HOUSING OFFICERS

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER'S have emphasised both the inadequacies of the present methods the Housing Commission is using to deal with the human problems of housing and also stressed the need for specialists for the slum reclamation programme, Camp Pell, and the handling of problem families.

We have seen that the trained social worker has a vital role to play and should be given responsibility for the human relations problems that arise in allotting homes, re-housing families and assisting families in emergency housing camps to become eligible for new homes.

There is, though, another specialist we require - the trained housing manager.

In England housing management is a profession developed to play an important part in the national task of housing.

It is recognised that from a financial viewpoint that good housing management is good business. It ensures that the right people get the homes they need and are suited for, that evictions and rent arrears are kept to a minimum, that estates are efficiently run, and that they house a contented and responsible community.

The Work Of Housing Managers

The housing officer is responsible for registering applications, interviewing and visiting applicants and for carrying out the letting policy of the housing authority, through a points system or some other fair method of selection.

In slum reclamation work the housing officer has a particularly important task to fulfil in the selection and placing of tenants.

When the area marked out for demolition has been acquired by the authority, the best plan is to give the manager charge of the area before the demolition begins, so that he or she can get to know the tenants thoroughly and carry out the entire work of transference to the new houses or flats with the fullest knowledge of each family's characteristics.

When the tenant has arrived at the new estate, the manager's personal interest based on encouragement rather than criticism, and tactful advice on the use of some of the fittings will do much to enable the tenant to adapt himself to his new environment and in the case of sub-standard families, prevent them from slipping back into old habits.

"Housing a contented and responsible community."

The manager will realise when a family is outgrowing its accommodation and will know of cases where a family has dwindled and bedroom space is being wasted and so can arrange a transfer.

Rent Collection

Rent collection may seem a matter of dreary routine, but in fact it is interesting and highly skilled, and forms the basis of the entire work of management. The weekly visits give the estate manager the opportunity to build up personal relationships with the tenants. These visits are also used to make enquiries regarding repairs and defects.

The rent collector's aim is to create a sense of responsibility in the tenant and to help him realise that the landlord's obligations to carry out repairs is balanced by his own obligation to pay rent regularly out of which those repairs must be paid and to take care of the property so as to keep them to a minimum.

Enforcement of notices to quit, though necessary against a small minority of tenants, is an admission of failure if widely used. When arrears of rent occur it is necessary to discriminate between the different classes of arrears and to distinguish those tenants who may be genuinely unable temporarily to pay, and those who should, with better management or better will, be able to meet their responsibilities. Where there is a rental rebate scheme, the manager will be responsible for assessment of rebates.

The housing manager is responsible for upkeep of the estate. This may range from the maintenance of new houses, involving repair of day-to-day defects to the care of old property. A comprehensive knowledge of building construction materials, plumbing and sanitary work is required.

Welfare Work

One of the main principles underlying the manager's work is co-ordination. He is the link between landlord and tenant, between the tenant and the various departments of the housing authority, and between the tenant and the various social organisations in the neighbourhood.

With a good knowledge of social service the manager can assist or advise on matters of employment, child welfare, education, assistance of the aged.

The continuous contact of the housing officers with thousands of tenants gives an exceptional opportunity for finding out where difficulties are likely to arise and for putting families in touch at an early stage with services which may be helpful to them.

The housing manager should also be interested in the development of community facilities on the estate and give any informal help or advice that may be asked.

In England, the training of housing officers and managers is undertaken by the Society of Housing Managers. Theoretical and practical work is done concurrently. The subjects required are: construction and maintenance, sanitation of buildings, estate records and accounts, landlord and tenant law, law of housing, machinery of government, social services, family income.

Need In Victoria

In Victoria, where there are now 22,000 State owned homes, housing officers and managers could be responsible for:-

1. Interview, investigation and selection of tenants for Commission houses to ensure that those in greatest need are given priority and that families are suited for the homes allotted to them.
2. Management of slum reclamation areas during transitory period.
3. Management of Commission housing estates.

Managers from the British Society of Housing Managers have recently been sent to British Dominions and Colonies to train local personnel. It might be a sound plan to ask the British Society to assist in the training of housing personnel here.

Scholarships

It should be possible for a course of practical and theoretical training to be worked out by bodies such as the Social Studies and Law Departments of the Melbourne University and the Melbourne Technical College.

Scholarships could be offered by the Housing Commission to attract young people to this important community service work.

