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An Irregular publication for the members of the Town Planning Research Group.....
 (Not for general publication or republication.)

This Issue:-

1. "The Housing Commission and Urban Renewal." An extract from the document "Principles for an Urban Renewal Bill" which was prepared by the Committee for Urban Action and circulated by that organisation to all State Politicians.
2. "Homeless in the City." Some comments on accommodation for lone men in Melbourne.
3. Two New Books..... "Let's Be Human" (The Australian Labor Party's new deal for social welfare.)
 "Plan For Melbourne Part Two" (The Communist Party's second document on planning.)
4. Contributed "Bits and Pieces" on Transport.

1/32/0. "The Housing Commission and Urban Renewal."

The April issue of Irregular began a discussion on the proposals for Urban Renewal which have been stated by the Committee for Urban Action in their document "Principles for an Urban Renewal Bill."

It was announced in the last issue that in Irregular 32 there would be published in full the section of the C.U.A. document amplifying "The Housing Commission on Urban Renewal." Comments are invited on this subject for the next issue (No. 33).

(Correction to Irregular No. 31. In the article "Good Stuff on Urban Renewal" in the critical section "Two Arguments Too Many" the phrase "as well as increasing numbers of low-income earners" should have been added after item 4 on page 3 instead of item 3 to read:-

"The Housing Commission could be directed to build at an increasing rate a bigger variety and better design of high-density units initially on non-residential land in the inner area, suitable for middle-income earners to live in the increasingly popular inner areas, as well as increasing numbers of low-income earners."

Here now is the excerpt from the C.U.A. publication "Principles for an Urban Renewal Bill" circulated to all State parliamentarians:-

"The Housing Commission and Urban Renewal"

"The Housing Commission was created in 1938 to deal with what were then two pressing problems. One was to provide housing for low-income earners who were then living in wretched conditions, and the other was to clear slums.

The setting up of a Housing Commission occurred in the wake of widespread unemployment, a severe housing shortage, and a slumped building market. For many families, a number of the factors depressing incomes and housing conditions can be traced back to the depression of the early 1930's. There was, moreover, no town planning legislation or land use control.

Today, many of the depressing factors associated with the creation of the Housing Commission do not exist. Most particularly the building industry is active and extremely skilled. Given a system of government grants and mortgage assistance the private sector could supply housing to many low-income earners who at present have only the Commission to turn to for assistance with their housing. The housing supplied by the private sector could be supplied at prices less than at present required to provide units in the Commission's high rise blocks.

Already an agency (Home Finance Office and Home Ownership Advisory Bureau) exists through which government grants and mortgages could be advanced to encourage low income earners to acquire their own homes, and express their housing desires by being given options in the housing market that are at present open to those

1/32/0 cont,

who have the means to acquire their own homes: that is, to live in a villa as. the majority of people do, if they do desire.

Another changed circumstance is the extent to which the remaining older housing stock has been rehabilitated and improved, while much of the worst housing from the days of the slums in the 1930's has been removed.

The only worthwhile and reliable survey of slums in Melbourne was done in 1937. The survey found 3046 houses in very bad condition (earth floors, bad ventilation, no water etc) and requiring demolition, and a further 3138 needed repairs to make them habitable. Since then the Commission has demolished 1475 houses that were in the demolition category, and 1794 houses that were in the repairable category. Others of the number of unfit houses from 1938 have been demolished by private redevelopment. A significant number have been renovated and improved and are now sought after houses-a collection of such houses is in Palmerston Place Carlton.

In some quarters it is held that constant deterioration is an ever present characteristic of the older housing stock, particularly in the inner suburbs, and that numbers of slums are continually increasing. No evidence has been advanced to back this claim.

Against this pessimistic view is the claim that the older areas are in better condition than they have been in the past, and are rehabilitating and adapting themselves to modern requirements and standards at no cost to the Government. A number of factors need to be considered here:

(1) A revolution in sanitary plumbing and fittings has made internal kitchen, bathroom and W. C. facilities readily available throughout the community and within the reach of a majority of people both rich and poor.

(2) Today, a higher level of individual or family income allows more to be spent on establishing and maintaining a comfortable home than was possible in the 1930's.

(3) Building and rehabilitation techniques have been developed permitting the upgrading of old structures, and a majority of low income earners have it within their means to keep their level of accommodation well above slum level.

(4) The inflow of migrants into inner suburbs has been virtually a complete retrieval of these suburbs with substantial, basic rehabilitation having taken place in even the most modest dwelling.

(5) A significant increase in home ownership in the inner areas is leading to considerable improvements being made even to the homes of the poor.

(6) The cultural prejudice which has lain behind the rejection of terrace houses and cottages, is now changing. Houses in the inner suburbs are being sought by all income groups who see them as desirable homes.

While it may be a worthwhile goal that some people should live in better housing than they do at present, it does appear that the "slum" reclamation" policy of the Commission is destroying large numbers of repairable and satisfactory houses. Creating a surplus, or adequate supply, of subsidised housing for the low income groups, of an acceptable type, would be an appropriate inducement that might coax out those still living in poor quality housing.

Within this conflicting process of rehabilitation by the open market and destruction of the older housing stock by Government or private enterprises, those who are on fixed low incomes, and rent their accommodation, suffer most. Either process will cause considerable rises in rents. A call for widespread rehabilitation, enforced by an Act of Parliament, and widespread destruction of modest housing by urban renewal programmes, is ill considered unless accompanied by a call for the implementation of measures to overcome the evil consequences of both lines of action.

The shortage of new housing at rents within the reach of low income earners is one major factor that was present when the Commission was created and still is present.

Each year there is a steady increase in the number of applicants eligible and waiting for Housing Commission Accommodation: In 1966/67 there were 13041 applicants; 1967/68 14099; and at 30.6.69 there were 14295 applicants on the waiting list.

The urgent and important work facing the Commission is not the elimination of old low income housing but to provide an optimum supply of new housing for low-income earners.

1/32/0 cont.

Both the provision of an optimum supply of new units for low income earners, and the satisfying of the expressed preferences of those on the waiting list for detached villas, is made impossible by the present policy of building extremely expensive high-rise complexes on land where large numbers of houses which were not substandard were destroyed.

The Commission's determination to enter the field of what it calls "urban renewal" will only further aggravate the existing situation.

The provision of subsidised housing for low income groups should be separated from so called "slum clearance", and should not be in association with or the generator of, "urban renewal" projects.

In 1965 only 5% of the Commissions applicants wanted to live in a flat in preference to a house. A survey of Commission's tenants already living in flats showed that 74% still wanted to live in a house. Further more, 84% of the Commission's applicants wanted to buy their own home. ("Victorian Housing Today and Tomorrow," by Hon. Lindsay Thompson M. L. C., Minister for Housing, 1965.)

It might be considered excusable to ignore these preferences if it was cheaper to build flats than houses, and if present practice was seeing an optimum number of units built for the limited finance available for new low income housing.

The fact is that the reverse is the case. A great many more houses could be supplied for a given outlay, than could flats. As well, because clearance is carried out to make land available for expensive high rise estates, a large number of houses of low income earners are being destroyed including houses that are not substandard.

Even though the present slum clearance and flat building policy has seen a 14% increase in housing units, within the clearance areas some 260% increase would have been achieved if, instead, villa homes had been built on vacant land in the suburbs and only substandard houses removed from the housing stock, with the land being redeveloped by the private market (either the owner, or developer who buys the land).

The doubtful value of continued slum clearance, and the high cost of providing units in high rise estates, are advanced as arguments against the Housing Commission being involved in urban renewal.

Urban Renewal legislation should replace those sections of the Housing Act 1958 which give the Housing Commission power to carry out slum reclamation.

The power to issue Demolition Orders should be withdrawn. They represent a gross invasion of the rights of the individual. It is for the owner, or his financial advisors, to determine whether or not to repair the building.

The Health Commission should be given the power to prohibit the occupation of buildings which are unhealthy. The Local Government Department should have the power to prohibit the occupation of buildings that are structurally unsound, subject to appeals to the referees under the Uniform Building Regulations. Prohibition by either Authority should specify the defects which should be removed to make the structure habitable.

The Housing Commission should concentrate its attention on the provision of low income housing as distinct from urban renewal. Firstly it should concentrate on housing the 14000 applicants. After this, it should concentrate on creating a variety of housing units as a surplus stock for those likely to be displaced by urban renewal schemes. These should be constructed throughout the metropolitan area.

The Commission should only be involved in building in renewal areas if the renewal agency desires it to do so in order to supply low income housing in the area.

2/32/0

HOMELESS in the CITY

"Room to let", "Board and Lodging"; "Boarding House"; "Guest House"; "Vacancy for one man"; "Casual Board". Such signs as these used frequently adorn the big old houses in the inner suburbs. But it is rare to see such advertisements today.

Quite a number of the houses which in the past provided accommodation for boarders or room tennants have been pulled down by the Housing Commission, some have been demolished by private builders. An increasing proportion of these houses are now being bought by families in the middle income bracket who use the whole house for family accomadation. For these reasons there is less accomodation available for men who wish to board as cheaply as possible.

2/32/0

Gordon House Future.

Gordon House in Little Bourke Street is one of the few remaining very big lodging houses left where lone men can get cheap board. The owners of Gordon House plan to demolish it so that this valuable piece of city property can return more profit.

At present 560 men can be accommodated at Gordon House. They pay \$1.80. for a single room, \$1.30 for a bed in a shared room, and 90 cents for a bed in a dormitory.

When the boarders heard this boarding house was to be demolished they discussed forming a co-operative to buy the \$756,000 building and to pay for it from the profits from the lodging.

The limited liability company that owns Gordon House made \$28,000 profit last year.

Dispair of the Desperately Homeless.

Where can the lone man turn for board?

In December last year several hundreds of lone men lost their accommodation when the Elizabeth Guest House in West Melbourne was gutted by fire.

Now five hundred beds are to be taken out of the pool of cheap lodgings, deepening the crisis in the general shortage of rooming accommodation in Melbourne. This particularly affects the lone man who is not provided for by the Housing Commission.

Night Lodging for Day Labourers.

Perhaps few countries in the world have such a need for casual accommodation for lone men as Australia has.

Our rural economy has been built on the sweat of the itinerant worker. Such a workforce needs city accommodation between seasonal jobs in the country.

Even with technological and social changes which are taking place in Australia, there is still a vast army of single men who seek casual employment and need to be provided with casual accommodation.

A Decent Life.

"Most of the residents at Gordon House may not be decent in money, but they are trying to be decent in other ways." Mr. Bill Ninnis a railway worker lodging at Gordon House, said this in an interview recently.

He was commenting on the campaign which Mr. "Tiny" Wintringham initiated to buy the building from the present owners and to run the boarding house as a co-operative.

Mr. Wintringham says that "Gordon House is like a club.....its essential for many blokes who otherwise got no hope. But they don't want assistance from charitable or religious organisations." And Mr. Ninnis, warned "If this place closes a lot of the old blokes would die. They are nearly all battlers and they want to be left a chance to carry on at Gordon House."

Support From Others.

The men of Gordon House have alerted the public as to what is planned by the company that owns this building. As the men say, it is more than a building, it is a club for many hundreds of men who have great need for such acceptance in the community.

Their independent spirit has already aroused support. The Builders Laborer's Federation are considering banning work on the demolition of this building.

Whether the men are successful in their bid to form a co-operative or not, they have been successful in highlighting the plight of the lone man in our city.

They have shaken the complacency of many of those who are fortunate to have good health, economic security and whose family relationships conform more closely to what is regarded as normal. And this is a big step towards the planning of a human community for all.

An Apology. The book reviews and "Bits and Pieces" on Transport are being held over for "Irregular" 33. The editors apologise for this.