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MUST WE HAVE SLUMS?

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NOTE

This brochure, edited by Charles Yale Harrison, is reprinted from a series of articles on housing by Paul Sann and Malcolm Logan which recently appeared in the *New York Post*. The New York City Housing Authority acknowledges with gratitude the right of republication. However, while in general agreement with the opinions set forth in this pamphlet, the Authority must point out that this brochure is in no way an official expression of fact, viewpoint or policy. This is the ninth of a series on public housing, copies of which may be obtained free by addressing the New York City Housing Authority, 10 East 40th Street, New York City.

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New York: a city of decaying tenements against a background of skyscrapers and luxurious apartment houses. There are 17 square miles of slum and blighted area in this, the richest city in the richest country in the world.

—Photograph by Trubov.

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A TYPICAL FAMILY

Sam and Jenny Weber are looking for a home. Since July 8, 1913, they have lived in an old-law tenement at 116 Lewis Street on the Lower East Side. But last month they were notified by the bank which owns the building that they must move by January 31st.

A law which went into effect a year ago established certain standards of sanitation and fireproofing for old-law tenements, and it would cost the bank more than $3,000 to comply with the law. Rather than spend this money the bank has told all the tenants that it is going to close the building.

The Webers, who have five children, born and reared at 116 Lewis Street, are paying $20 a month total for two four-room cold water flats, which is an unusually low rent, even for the slums. They cannot afford to pay any more. Sam Weber, a tailor, gets only a few hours' work a week in the East Side cloak and suit factory which employs him and his average weekly pay is $9 or $10. The eldest son, Milton, twenty, has no steady job. The eldest daughter, Lillian, nineteen, has only occasional employment. The three younger children are in school.

When Mrs. Weber got her vacation order, she resigned herself to crowding the family into five rooms, for she knew that rents elsewhere were higher. She looked all over the East Side, in Brooklyn and The Bronx, but she found that tenement flats of any kind were scarce and dear. Other banks were closing other houses. Landlords were asking $30 to $40 a month for five-room flats much less desirable than hers. Even during the post-war housing shortage, when Sam Weber

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had steady work at $20 to $26 a week, they didn't pay that much. The most they ever paid was $26 for a four-room flat. The Webers are one of hundreds of slum families who have actually suffered from an unbalanced attempt to make living conditions better and safer for them.

For the protection of slum tenants, the State has passed laws requiring owners of tenements to make their buildings more safe from fire, that nightmare of all tenement dwellers. Last year it began to enforce a section of the law which placed criminal responsibility for loss of life caused by law violations squarely upon the person who actually owns or controls the house. Enforcement of these new laws has resulted in closing thousands of tenement houses, so that the Webers and other families like them are being forced into worse slums renting for more money.

The campaign of extermination against old-law tenements would have been a wonderful thing for the slum tenants—if decent low-rental housing into which they could move had been built for them. But New York City's slum clearance has been completely lopsided. Since the beginning of 1934, when strict enforcement of the tenement house laws started, the number of apartments within the means of families like the Webers has been reduced by 39,571.

Those 39,571 low-rental flats, out of a total of 547,391 old-law tenement apartments spread throughout the city, provided homes for 150,000 persons. While these thousands of tenements were being closed or torn down, the only new low-rental housing built in this city was First Houses, in which 120 families of 361 persons are living. The model housing development in Williamsburg will take care of about 6,000 persons when it is completed and Harlem River Houses will shelter about 2,000 more.

With 150,000 persons moved out of their tenements and new accommodations provided for only 361, the result has been further crowding of the tenements still in use and a

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shortage of any kind of cheap flats. Even when the two large housing developments are completed, there will still be a net reduction of cheap apartments for almost 142,000 persons.

Mrs. Weber tried to get into First Houses. So did a great many other people whose years in the slums had not killed their desire for clean, airy, sanitary living quarters. In the first two weeks after the New York City Housing Authority, builder of First Houses, started looking for tenants, 3,000 applications were received and the Authority had to stop taking them. The Webers were not one of the lucky 120 families chosen, for preference was given to those who had lived in the old tenements on the site of First Houses. They have asked for an apartment in the Williamsburg housing development, when it is completed. But they have little hope of getting in there, for though applications for the 6,000 apartments there have not been opened, the Housing Authority has already received letters from 20,000 families, begging for admission.

The New York City Housing Authority, which was organized at the request of the National Administration, prepared almost two years ago a comprehensive plan for complete elimination of the city's slums in ten years. If that plan had been adopted promptly, Mrs. Weber would not now be facing the necessity of moving from her slum tenement to a worse and more expensive one. But the plan is gathering dust in some pigeon-hole in Washington and at the start of President Roosevelt's second administration Mrs. Weber is still getting almost nothing from Washington but more promises.

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FIRST HOUSES

First Houses, so called because it was the first publicly constructed low-rental housing ever built in this city, is a monument to the ingenuity, persuasiveness and downright gall of the New York City Housing Authority.

The Housing Authority has managed for three years to exist without any appropriation from Federal, State or City government. It built First Houses without putting up a cent of cash. The PWA was given $123,000,000 for low-rental housing in 1933. In 1934 the New York City Housing Authority was established. It began a study of the city's slums with the object of drawing up a long-range program for slum clearance and publicly financed low-rental housing. Before this survey was completed it recommended specific projects, including the development now under construction in Williamsburg and Harlem River houses. In the spring of 1934 it began to gather options on the twelve blocks selected in Williamsburg, without any assurance that the PWA would approve the plan.

All this time it was looking for suitable sites for new homes for slum dwellers. It found one on East Third Street, where Vincent Astor owned practically the entire south side of Third Street between First Avenue and Avenue A, as well as part of the block around the corner on Avenue A. Mr. Astor, who had found his inherited slum properties a source of little income and considerable embarrassment, was willing to sell at a bargain price.

In December, 1934, the Housing Authority came to an agreement with him to buy his property, assessed at $442,700, for $189,281.31—a rate of $3.50 per square foot. At this point in the negotiations the Authority admitted to Mr. Astor that it had no money. It offered him instead a sixty-five-year mortgage at 1½ per cent for the first year and 3½ per cent interest thereafter, and Mr. Astor, having gone so far, accepted

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the terms. He even agreed to deferment of the first year's interest until First Houses was built and producing income.

Next the Authority tackled the problem of financing the work of replacing the Astor tenements with new housing. Up to this time the Authority had not succeeded in getting formal approval of any housing project in the city, and its members were growing pretty pessimistic.

Langdon W. Post, chairman of the Authority, undertook to persuade Relief Administrator Harry Hopkins and the TERA, then administering relief here, that First Houses should be built as a relief project. They replied that all housing was under the jurisdiction of the PWA. Mr. Post's answer was that he intended to tear down every third tenement and then merely remodel each of the eight remaining units, so that it wasn't new housing but merely a remodeling job. On that basis, it was approved as a relief project, which meant that the Housing Authority got materials and labor free.

No one seriously objected when it developed later that five of the eight units had to be rebuilt from the ground up and even the foundations had to be strengthened before the buildings could be erected, so that there was considerably more new construction than remodeling.

The Housing Authority next tried to buy the two houses at 130 and 132 East Third Street, which belonged to one Andrew Muller. A satisfactory price could not be obtained and the Housing Authority started condemnation proceedings. It became necessary then for the Authority to deposit $35,000 with the court to insure that Mr. Muller would get his money if his property were condemned. Mr. Post went to see Bernard Baruch and rode down to his office with him. He had a sales talk prepared to prove that Mr. Baruch would be making a good investment if he loaned the Authority $35,000 with a mortgage on the two Muller properties as security.

Mr. Baruch wasn't interested in hearing the details.

"If Vincent Astor accepted your mortgage on those terms, it's all right with me", he said. "I'll send you a check at once."

The money was deposited. Supreme Court Justice McLaughlin dismissed Mr. Muller's contention that the Authority had

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no constitutional right to condemn property and awarded him $26,500, 15 per cent less than the assessed valuation of his property.

So, by methods the most resourceful shoestring real estate operator would have envied, the Authority got its first housing project going in the spring of 1935.

First Houses was opened on December 3, 1935. Where the shabby, dreary row of tenements had stood, with barren backyards littered with filth and debris, there are eight modern, fireproof buildings. Each building has light on all four sides, each apartment two exposures. The kitchens are beautifully equipped, and there is even a shower in every bathroom for families which formerly had no bathrooms at all.

The rear yards have been thrown together, landscaped and planted with grass, trees, flowers and vines. Nearly 7,500 square feet at the west end has been equipped by the Park Department as a playground. There is a sand lot for the younger children and benches for their parents. Its 120 families, chosen from 3,000 applicants, pay an average rental of $6.05 per room per month.

The members of the Housing Authority are proud of First Houses, as a demonstration of what low-rental housing should be and as an achievement in building without funds. But they concede that the slums cannot be cleared by the methods used to build First Houses. In the first place, it is much too small. It would take 4,166 First Houses to take care of the 500,000 families that live in our slums. Second, the Housing Authority never again expects to find an owner like Mr. Astor who is willing to sell for no cash down and an unusually low mortgage interest rate. Third, the Authority concedes that relief labor is slow and costly and that housing should be built by contractors with labor paid the prevailing wage if the building industry is to be given the stimulus it needs.

All this means the expenditure of billions of dollars, a large part of which must be an outright gift of the Government. New York City's slum dwellers are still waiting for the National Administration to fulfill its promises and adopt such a program.

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WILLIAMSBURG AND HARLEM

The Williamsburg housing development in one of the most squalid slums in the city is more than an experiment in publicly financed housing for the poor. It is a $12,500,000 laboratory in which the Federal Government is learning how such housing should be built. The development covers twelve square blocks and will, when it is completed this fall, house about 6,000 families who once lived in wretched, dark, airless firetrap tenements. A smaller project, Harlem River Houses, is being built on a four-block site in Harlem for about 2,000 Negro families.

The Public Works Administration which is building them, calls them "demonstration projects", and they are a demonstration of the manner in which our slums, housing 500,000 families, can be abolished. The site of the Williamsburg development was chosen by the New York City Housing Authority shortly after it was formed in 1934 to help direct expenditure here of Federal appropriations for housing.

Say "slum" to a New Yorker and he thinks immediately of the East Side of Manhattan made infamous and unforgettable by Jacob Riis in his long fight for decent housing for the poor. But there are slums as bad or even worse in other parts of the city, and East Side land prices are so high that the Housing Authority passed it by in favor of Williamsburg, where real estate is reasonably cheap. The chosen site, between Bushwick Avenue and Leonard Street, Maujer and Meserole Streets, was a hideous, filthy clutter of ramshackle brick and frame buildings in which about 1,400 families existed and disease and crime flourished.

Without waiting for formal approval of the site from the PWA, the Housing Authority began collecting options to buy some 413 separate parcels of property there. At that time PWA Administrator Ickes had discarded his first plan, to build low-rental apartments through local housing authorities.

ERRATUM

In the first paragraph on this page, please read "persons" for "families" wherever the word occurs.

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He had decided that the Federal Government should be in complete control and that building everywhere in the country should be directed from Washington.

Unabashed by the imminent possibility that it would be disowned by the PWA, the Housing Authority announced on July 12, 1934, that sixteen square blocks in Williamsburg had been almost completely assembled. It went further and chose a plan for a community to be built on the site, out of designs submitted in competition by 278 architects. It was not until autumn that the PWA formally approved the Williamsburg project.

The PWA began taking up the options the Housing Authority had obtained in October and by the following April had bought 60 per cent of the land. Through the city it instituted condemnation proceedings for the land of the remaining owners, who were trying to make a good thing out of it and were holding up the Government for exorbitant prices.

There was a disagreement between the Housing Authority and Mr. Ickes about the proper method of condemnation. The Housing Authority and Mayor LaGuardia thought it could be done much more quickly by the city. Finally, on May 14, 1935, Mayor LaGuardia went to Washington and made a sporting offer to Mr. Ickes.

"Let us condemn the land in the State courts," he said, "and we'll get it for you in thirty days."

The challenge was accepted. On June 7 Supreme Court Justice Lockwood upheld the right of the State to condemn land for housing. On June 12, one day before the deadline, the Mayor turned over to the PWA the deeds for all the remaining pieces of property.

Before demolition of the 565 buildings in the area could be started, the persons living in them had to be moved out. The Housing Authority found new quarters for most of them; in many cases only temporary quarters until the Williamsburg development is ready for its tenants.

The vacant land for Harlem River Houses was bought by the PWA at about the same time that the Williamsburg site

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was acquired, but the problem there was much simpler because the entire site was owned by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and there were not hundreds of grasping owners to dicker with. Both developments were financed and built in the same way. The Federal Government, through the PWA, put up all the money—$12,500,000 for Williamsburg and $4,500,000 for Harlem River Houses. Forty-five per cent of the cost was ultimately to be a grant—a gift. The remaining 55 per cent was to be a loan with interest at 3 per cent, and as security the PWA was to take mortgages on the developments.

So far as construction is concerned, the Housing Authority has had nothing to do with either project. It assembled the land in both cases and provided plans; then the PWA took over. Both developments are being built by private contractors employing workmen who are paid the full union scale, for the projects were undertaken primarily to create employment and stimulate the building industry rather than to wipe out the social evil of the slums.

The buildings are four-story walkups, with two exposures for every apartment, modern bathrooms, even electrically equipped kitchens. Most of the apartments will overlook gardens or play spaces for children.

The old tenements on the Williamsburg site covered about 90 per cent of the land; the new buildings will cover only 33 per cent. Nevertheless, where only 1,400 families were crowded into the old tenements, 1,600 will live spaciously in the new garden apartments. A number of commercial buildings—little stores and factories—were eliminated and nine acres of land were added to the development by closing two streets.

The PWA did not intend to go into the real estate management business by operating Williamsburg and Harlem River Houses when they were completed. It intended to turn them over to the Housing Authority for operation. There, however, another difference of opinion arose. The Housing Authority passed a resolution declining to assume management of Williamsburg at rentals averaging $8.50 per room per

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month, the minimum indicated by an estimate of the cost of the development.

As the result of a readjustment in the finance charges on the Williamsburg project, the Authority recently announced the following scale of rentals for the development.

2 Rooms — from $4.45 to $4.95 per apt. per week.
3 Rooms — from $5.05 to $5.80 per apt. per week.
4 Rooms — from $5.55 to $6.65 per apt. per week.
5 Rooms — from $6.15 to $7.20 per apt. per week.

The tenants of Williamsburg and Harlem River houses are being chosen very carefully, after rigid investigation. The total family income cannot exceed five times the monthly rent, but each family must have some savings and insurance.

Some persons have the idea that slum dwellers live in slums from preference rather than necessity; that they actually prefer squalor to cleanliness; that they are too stingy to pay a little additional rent for the vast difference between a model housing development and an old-law tenement.

Repeat that theory to any one on the Housing Authority and they will squelch you with these facts: The Authority has already received 14,000 letters from persons begging for apartments in Harlem River Houses and 20,000 requests for flats in Williamsburg.

The PWA's experience in building these two developments resulted in several changes of policy.

Under the terms of the Wagner-Steagall Bill which is now pending before Congress, a United States Housing Authority will be set up which will advance funds to local authorities to enable them to engage in the construction of low-rental housing developments. This will make it possible for greater speed and efficiency because it will eliminate topheavy centralization of authority which in the past has resulted in long and costly delays. The bill calls for the granting of an annual subsidy which will cover the difference between what low-income tenants can afford to pay and the actual economic rental. In New York City such an arrangement would result in an average rental of $6 per room per month.

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NEW YORK FACES A HOUSING SHORTAGE

For three years the New York City Tenement House Department under Commissioner Langdon W. Post has been fighting a war of extermination against the 65,000 old-law tenements in this city. Its weapon has been the Multiple Dwelling Law, which sets minimum standards of sanitation and fire protection for tenement houses.

This law and subsequent amendments require extensive alterations in old-law tenements and the cost is so great that the owners of about 3,000 houses have closed and abandoned their buildings in the last three years rather than sink any more money in them. Closing and razing these dismal, insanitary firetraps is a very laudable activity. But it doesn't go far toward solving the problem of the slums when the tenants of these buildings have nowhere to go except other slums just as bad and usually more expensive.

The only flats in the city renting at prices slum dwellers can afford to pay are in the old-law tenements which have so far escaped the Tenement House Department's campaign. So as slum tenements have been closed, the poor have crowded a little closer in the slums that still remain. The inevitable end of this process of elimination is a shortage of cheap housing—unless either private enterprise or a generous government builds new low-rental housing.

Years ago it became impossible for private enterprise to build low-rental housing and make any money from it, so there remains only the government, either city, State or Federal, to end the blight of the slums.

So far, the State of New York has never tried to abolish slums except by regulating the kind of housing private enterprise can build and maintain. The very existence of slums proves that this approach has been a failure. The reason is obvious. The slum owner wants to crowd the maximum num-

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ber of tenants into a building constructed as cheaply as possible. Every law which raises the standard of living for his tenants costs him money. There has always been such powerful opposition to regulatory legislation that it is a wonder any has ever been enacted, and no wonder at all that property owners have usually managed to repeal or nullify the housing laws.

The first tenement house law was passed in 1867 and if it had been enforced the old-law tenements which have made New York's slums infamous could never have been built. But most of the law was repealed and the rest nullified and so 90,000 tenements were built with windowless rooms, with no fireproofing, with no central heating or hot water, with toilets, in thousands of cases, in the back yards.

Not until 1901 was construction of such tenements forbidden by law and now until 1929, when the Multiple Dwelling Law was passed, was any real effort made to require old-law tenement owners to make any drastic changes in their buildings.

In 1934 and 1935 two important amendments to the Multiple Dwelling Law were passed. The first required fire-retarding of all public halls in old-law tenements. The second required a toilet for every family. Another amendment placed criminal liability for deaths due to law violations squarely upon the person in control of the property. No longer was it possible for the real owner to hide behind a dummy and escape the threat of prosecution.

Enforcement of these laws, intended to safeguard slum dwellers from fire and disease, has resulted in the elimination of 3,000 old-law tenements. But it has also brought us to the first stage of a low-rental housing shortage. Complete compliance with the laws passed since 1929 costs about from $3,500 to $5,000 for a typical old-law tenement.

As soon as the Tenement House Department began notifying tenement owners that they must make these alterations, those who were making very little money began closing their buildings. Forty per cent of the actions begun by the department in the past three years have resulted in vacated buildings.

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It is estimated that tenements containing 10,384 apartments housing 40,000 persons were thus abandoned. Many more owners closed their buildings without any action by the department; others converted their tenements into rooming houses and so escaped the multiple dwelling law; a number remodeled their tenements into medium-priced apartments too expensive for slum dwellers, and many abandoned buildings were torn down by the New York City Housing Authority.

Altogether in three years, out of 547,391 old-law tenement apartments in the city, 7 per cent of 39,571 apartments have been taken out of use. Those 39,571 apartments housed 150,000 persons. During the same period, the only low-rental housing built here was First Houses, in which 361 persons are living. Deficit: accommodations for 149,639 persons.

Three years ago about 30 per cent of the tenement flats on the East Side were vacant and vacancies in other slum areas were considerably lower. Last November, East Side vacancies had dropped to 8 per cent; in the Bronx vacancies were 4.5 per cent; in Red Hook and Brownsville 4 per cent, and in Harlem 1.6 per cent. A re-check is being made and figures obtained so far indicate a further decrease in the number of vacant flats.

Recently tenants began to complain of the scarcity of housing and the higher rents demanded by landlords as tenement flats became scarcer. Then a number of savings banks which became large owners of slum property through foreclosure of mortgages during the depression began a deliberate campaign to use this situation to force repeal or suspension of the new housing laws.

In the winter of 1936-37 they began sending out wholesale notices to tenants that they would have to move because their buildings were going to be vacated. Their explanation was that they could not spend their depositors' money making costly alterations to unprofitable tenements and that they were not going to run the risk of criminal prosecution for any loss of life in the fires which every winter kill an average of forty-four old-law tenement dwellers.

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That created an emergency which required an investigation and hearings by the Housing Authority. The Authority recommended passage of a law giving landlords six months' immunity from prosecution if they agree to make the required alterations during the six-month period. The Housing Authority has been criticized for proposing this law. Its members assert that if this had not been done the bankers and other landlords would have made a strong and possibly successful attempt to repeal the recent housing laws.

There are good grounds for believing that the tenement owners are not all honest when they say they cannot afford to comply with the law. Joseph Milner, real estate consultant to the Housing Authority, made a study of one building which a bank decided to vacate. This building, assuming the extremely high vacancy loss of 10 per cent and the absurdly high operation cost of $30 per room per year, produces now an annual net profit of $1,226. Experience has shown that tenants paying $3, $4 or $5 per room per month will pay $1 more per room if a tenement is thoroughly renovated to comply with the law. If the bank alters the house and raises rents, the annual net profit will be $2,522. If it closes the building, it will pay $783 a year in taxes without getting a penny in return. It would seem like good business in this case to make the alterations, and perhaps the whole eviction campaign of the banks was just a bluff. But with low-rental housing so scarce, the city could not afford to demand a show-down.

Even if all the old-law tenement owners should suddenly decide to comply with the law, their buildings would still be far below present standards of decent housing. They would remain slums—safer and more sanitary slums but still slums. "The only ultimate cure for them is dynamite," says Langdon Post.

But you can't dynamite the slum tenements until there is an adequate program of new and decent housing to take care of the thousands of persons put out of their homes.

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SOME EUROPEAN EXAMPLES

In London, Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, Berlin and the Scandinavian cities poor people with little money to spend for rent can live in good houses and apartments built with public funds. But in New York City they have, largely, nowhere to live but forty-year-old slum tenements without heat, hot water, sunlight, adequate sanitary conveniences or protection against fire. The more progressive European countries, ever since the war and in some cases for a much longer time, have accepted as an axiom of government the proposition that slums can be abolished only by the liberal use of government money. For many years they have built low-rental housing because they believe that elimination of slums repays the public in better citizens, less crime and less disease.

In the United States these two ideas are only now winning grudging acceptance in a few places. President Roosevelt has repeatedly included low-rental housing as an essential of his plans for the more abundant life, yet after four years of his Administration no permanent, nation-wide, long-range housing program has been enacted into law.

Most Americans and their elected representatives are either indifferent to the existence of slums in all of our large cities or are actively opposed to public housing because they believe it is a socialistic idea. The world-wide publicity given the magnificent municipal apartments built by the socialist administration of Vienna since the war and the fact that the largest of these "palaces of the people" was named for Karl Marx possibly had something to do with prejudicing many Americans against houses built for the poor with public funds.

But Holland, which is certainly not socialistic, has wiped out its slums. And staid, conservative England began to build public housing even before the turn of the century. Sir Raymond Unwin, long the foremost advocate of low-rental housing in England, told The Post that even before the war the London County Council had built with local funds 11,705 dwellings—a dwelling being either an apartment or a cottage for one family.

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Since the war, according to Sir Raymond, Great Britain has rehoused 1,200,000 poor families in buildings subsidized by the Government. These homes are of two general types: one-family cottages and apartment houses. The typical cottage has two floors, with either two or three bedrooms on the upper floor and a living room, kitchen and bath on the ground floor. The flats are of three, four and five stories, with apartments of various sizes. In London, Glasgow and Liverpool a total of 100,000 apartments has been built. Sir Raymond said that the rents paid by the families occupying these dwellings vary from $7 to $20 a month, the average being somewhere between these figures.

Dispatches to *The Post* from London, however, say that the flats built by the London County Council rent for $12.44 per month for two-room apartments up to $34.63 a month for four-room apartments, which is still, compared with New York rentals, fairly cheap. Since 1919 public housing has been under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health. During that time methods of procedure have changed many times, and the Government has granted subsidies to private builders as well as local authorities.

In general, however, this has been the procedure: the local government acquires the land, builds the houses and manages them, borrowing the money to finance the work. The houses and apartments are rented for less than the fixed charges—repairs, interest and amortization on the loan—and this loss is sustained by the national Government. The Government continues to make up the loss for the entire period of the loan, generally forty years, at the end of which time the local government will own the building free and clear. This simply means that the Government, instead of paying the subsidy in a large lump sum, spreads it over forty years.

In Vienna, which still leads all other cities in the amount of housing work done, the entire cost was borne by the municipality out of tax funds. In both Vienna and England land was obtained by methods which would probably cause a Fascist revolution here. Vienna forced private land owners to sell out to the city at a fraction of the real value of their holdings by heavy taxation and restriction on the amount of

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rent that could be charged. In England the tremendous inheritance taxes forced many persons whose inheritance consisted principally of land to liquidate at almost any price.

In Germany the municipalities have always been large land owners and low-rental housing there has been built on this municipal property. Almost everywhere on the Continent and the Scandinavian peninsula most of the housing work has been done by local government with local funds.

Despite wide difference in methods of acquiring land, financing construction and building housing in the European countries, all these schemes for better homes for the poor have one thing in common. Publicly subsidized housing has been accepted as a function of Government and is a permanent, planned enterprise.

The United States has not progressed beyond the first, impulsive, unplanned, haphazard phase. Housing has been regarded as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. We build roads, bridges and subways because we need them. So far we have not built low-rental housing because we needed it but because the President and his advisors decided that it would stimulate the building industry and provide employment.

So housing has been regarded merely as a part of the temporary emergency spending of public funds to assist economic recovery. No one has known from one year to another how much Congress would appropriate for the various agencies which have had charge of housing or how much of these lump-sum appropriations would be allotted to housing. Under these circumstances no planned development has been possible.

At present the Wagner-Steagall bill which provides for $1,000,000,000 of public housing is receiving the attention of legislative leaders. If the bill passes, it will be the first major forward step in American housing history.

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NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY

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MARY K. SIMKHOVITCH, *vice-chairman*
B. CHARNEY VLADECK
REV. E. ROBERTS MOORE
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