

The over-all shortage in some countries was due to destruction caused by the war, and in all countries to the cessation of building during the war years. This, however, is not the only reason for the shortage. There is a general realization that housing-conditions in the past have been very far from satisfactory, and the desire to improve the living-conditions of working-people has brought with it responsibility for heavy expenditure in connection with housing development.

In the countries visited I inspected a very large number of housing developments, but in general conception none equalled our own State housing in New Zealand. The problem, of course, is not entirely similar, as overseas the housing shortage is most acute close to large centres of population and has to be provided for more by tenements and flats than by individual housing units. The housing layouts, however, in Great Britain—many of which are of the semi-detached type—are good and furnish on completion amenities closely resembling those provided by our own schemes.

In England research facilities are provided on an extensive scale with a view to obtaining maximum economy and durability in building construction. This, I think, should be given more consideration in New Zealand. It is generally accepted that the timber used in house-construction in New Zealand is excessive, and with some minor alterations in design and more care in construction quite considerable savings could be made. This point was very forcibly brought to our notice in a report made during a recent visit to New Zealand by Sir Reginald Stradling, Chief Scientific Adviser of the Ministry of Works in Great Britain. Compared with New Zealand, in few other countries are materials so readily available for building either in brick or in concrete. Much greater consideration should therefore be given to their increased use here because of the better lasting qualities of these forms of construction.

Mass production is employed in many countries, but there was little evidence to show that any considerable savings had been obtained by this method. The chief benefits lay in quicker construction, but when mass-produced units were grouped in settlements there resulted a monotony of type which is a feature avoided by our State housing schemes.

The factory-produced aluminium units supplied in large quantities in Great Britain after the war provide quite comfortable living-accommodation. They are, however, relatively expensive, limited in floor area, and too stereotyped in appearance when grouped in settlements.

It is quite evident that a serious housing shortage still exists in this Dominion despite the efforts made in recent years to overtake this. On the basis of actual necessity it is difficult to assess this shortage and it is felt by this office that figures popularly quoted should be accepted with care. No doubt, in so far as State housing is concerned, the demand is partly created by the high standard of housing provided and by the comparatively low rentals charged.

In previous reports it was estimated that a target figure of 12,000 houses per annum should be aimed at to overtake the shortage within a reasonable period and without undue disturbance to other forms of construction. This year the target was exceeded by 33 per cent., and whilst no doubt this achievement, from the point of view of relief of the housing shortage, was extremely satisfactory, it must be pointed out that the results have only been achieved at the sacrifice of other types of building.

For practically a decade now in New Zealand severe restrictions have been placed upon construction of all types of buildings other than houses. Some priority has been given to schools, hospitals, and hydro-electric buildings, but in every field of Government building there is a pent-up demand which is of serious concern to the Government. In every centre the need for more accommodation is pressing, and it is hoped during the coming year to see some move made towards providing better accommodation for many of the State Departments. The construction of office accommodation in the major centres would have the very desirable effect of releasing to private people office accommodation which has been leased from them for State Departments since the commencement of the war.