

HOUSING and

A. J.

In this fifth article on the controversial subject of immigration, his argument into a more speculative and whole thesis goes rather beyond the usual bounds of the series therefore necessary

THE REMAINING PROBLEMS to be considered are the two most delicate of all, those of housing and integration.

It is almost certainly in the sphere of housing that people are most sensitive to the effects of immigration. Young families and others trying to find a home they can afford can easily become bitter about the apparent flood of immigrants that seems to make their task harder; and the appalling overcrowding that some immigrants, particularly coloured immigrants, often have to put up with does not endear them to the local community. For want of better accommodation, immigrants may live several to a room and even occupy a room in more than one shift, some leaving as others enter. The chance of being granted a council house is remote since one of the qualifications is usually an appreciable period of residence.

One way of housing immigrants is that practised in the Netherlands, where a proportion of all new housing is allocated to immigrants from the former Netherlands East Indies to ensure not only that they start off in decent conditions, but also that they are dispersed throughout the country. This sort of measure is admittedly highly attractive, but it does conflict with the principle that everyone, whether native or immigrant, should have full freedom of choice in housing. It is no more virtuous to reserve houses for immigrants as such than it is to reserve them for natives as such. Similarly it would be wrong to give government assistance only to towns with large immigrant populations when other towns had the same rehousing problem with natives. The white paper *Immigration from the Commonwealth* was therefore right to reject special measures for immigrants, and displayed good sense in its statement that "The solution must lie in a determined attack on the housing shortage generally and particularly on the shortage of accommodation to rent on reasonable terms." It is this shortage that is the root of all the housing difficulties experienced by natives and immigrants alike—overcrowding, the persistence of slums, homelessness, exorbitant rents and house prices.

It is commonly supposed that this central problem of housing shortage is one of number; that given, say, 350,000 new houses a year, the greater the number of families who want a house the greater the number who cannot have one and the greater the shortage. From this



viewpoint the influx of immigrants, like the growth of native population, will be regarded as accentuating the shortage, yet the shortage already exists independently of im-

migration. The real problem is not one of number, but of ensuring that the supply of houses matches the demand at prices which all can afford. When this has been achieved, it will hold true for any foreseeable level of demand, and the increase of population will no longer hold such terrors for us.

A house is a commodity, and one would expect that the existence of a large area of potential demand would call forth an abundant supply at the lowest possible prices—this is what has happened with refrigerators, washing machines and television sets. The reason why it has not happened with housing, although there is ample scope for the building industry to improve productivity, is that houses must have sites to stand on. New houses are today being provided against a background of intense (and unnatural) land scarcity, and this not only acts as a brake on the supply of housing but also increases land costs and so artificially increases the price to the buyer. The result is that prices of owner-occupied houses continue to soar, and the rent that a private landlord would have to ask to make investment in a house to let profitable is far higher than the lower-paid workers can afford to pay.

The first and most urgent step, therefore, is to eliminate the forces leading to scarcity of available land by liberalising the planning system, sweeping away the cumbersome Land Commission and betterment levy, and replacing them with a tax on land rent. The effects of such a tax would be widespread. There would cease to be any advantage in holding land out of use; on the contrary, there would be a spur to use it more effectively. The now depressed margin of production—which determines the general wage level of the community—would rise to its natural level. Land prices would be discounted in proportion to the amount of the tax payable, and if the tax were introduced as a substitute for the present local rating system, the burden borne by most householders would be appreciably reduced. With land relatively cheap and plentiful, economic expansion would accelerate and the demand for labour would increase. An attack could then be made on all the impoverishing restrictive practices that are rooted in the fear of unemployment.

Thus on the one hand the cost of housing would be lessened and on the other the general level of wages would be increased. In such conditions rent control should be progressively abandoned and the government should

INTEGRATION

ARTER

Subject of immigration the author carries which although an integral part of his scope of Land and Liberty, and does not represent its views.

declare its determination not to re-impose it. Landlords would then be able to buy houses to let, confident not only that the lower rents could be paid by prospective tenants out of higher earnings, but also that there was no likelihood of the erosion of their incomes by statutory controls as they have been in the past.

In addition to the withdrawal of rent control, other reforms that would help are the abolition of tariffs on imported building materials, the destruction of any monopolies or restrictive arrangements in any of the building supply industries, simplified conveyancing to reduce legal charges (compulsory land registration is in any event a prerequisite of land-value taxation), speeding up of planning procedure, a low Bank Rate to keep building society interest rates down, removal of taxes that increase prices, such as the selective employment tax and the ending of "stop-go" intervention in the economy which hits the small builder dependent on bank credit and plays havoc with the investment plans of the manufacturers of building components.

The consequence of all this—of the taxation of land rent and the other measures—would be a large and sudden demand for houses (both to buy and to rent), accompanied, in the freeing of land, by the removal of the builder's biggest obstacle to supplying them. Whatever is said about the traditionalism of the building industry, it is almost impossible to believe that there would not be enterprising builders who would seize such an opportunity. The rewards for speed and efficiency would be high, and the competition intense; the building industry would undergo many rapid changes.

One of the most important ways of improving productivity would be by taking the plunge into industrialised building. This is uneconomic unless a very large number of units are produced, but it would become irresistibly profitable when sales were virtually guaranteed by the huge demand. Once industrialised building was established, it would be fairly easy to expand output to cater for rises in population, including those caused by immigration. The standard of housing enjoyed by everybody would go up as the stock of sound, modern houses was increased, and the evils that can thrive only in shortage would disappear.

The final problem to be considered is that of integration. Even if housing and the other problems are dealt

with, there is still the difficulty of assimilating people with distinctive ways of life into their new host community. This innate difficulty has been seriously aggravated by the lack of adequate solutions to other problems, and by the current preoccupation with race and colour. For example, there is sometimes resistance to the sale of a house in an all-white road or estate to a coloured family because it is feared that other coloured families will be attracted, that there will be overcrowding, and that this will result in the lowering of the tone of the area and a decrease in the value of property there. If the housing shortage were ended, the pressures leading to overcrowding would wither away and the fear of occupation by coloured families would no longer have any basis.

The natural reserve of the English no doubt leads to many imagined slights that are in fact nothing at all to do with race and colour, and the self-consciousness that many Englishmen still feel and show when confronted with people of other races can easily create an exaggerated sense of the importance of racial differences. In these circumstances, particularly when events in other parts of the world are so identified with racial conflict, it is not surprising that in the minds of both natives and immigrants real problems soon become complicated by emotional reactions. Prejudice and hatred develop and the desire for integration is replaced by the desire to have nothing to do with one another.

The way to overcome this is to remove the factors that cause it: to find solutions to the various genuine problems that have already been discussed, and to attack vigorously the ignorance that leads people into making crude and false generalisations about foreigners. This ignorance—or, more precisely, lack of understanding, and apprehensiveness—stems from lack of personal contact with immigrants as individuals, and can be reduced only if personal contact becomes much more frequent and is accepted as contact with individuals rather than with types. For this reason the argument that integration of the immigrants here can be safeguarded only if the number of new entrants is strictly controlled is the reverse of the truth. The cure for ignorance, and for the tensions to which it gives rise, lies not in the entry of fewer immigrants but in the entry and integration of more immigrants. Moreover, harsh restrictions on entry are hardly likely to produce an atmosphere conducive to happy integration when the impression given to immigrants is that "we don't want too many like you!"

Immigrants are people to talk to, but we do not talk to them enough, and instead of cultivating personal relationships with individuals we label those individuals as members of a group and then endow the group with characteristics of its own. With colour prejudice this process is carried a stage further and a number of racial groups are themselves lumped together in a super-group, "coloured." This is a slipshod habit of thought that can lead to all kinds of fallacious conclusions. An employer may refuse to employ any coloured workers because a few he did employ were unsatisfactory (would he refuse

to employ fair-haired or brown-eyed workers for the same reason?); a landlady who once had an Irish lodger who was a drunkard, or a coloured lodger who took a prostitute to his room may vow to take no more Irish or coloured lodgers, when what she really wants is no more drunken lodgers or lodgers who entertain prostitutes; and any of us may declare a belief, say, that Britain should have coloured policemen, when what we mean to advocate is that an individual who is qualified to be a policeman should not be disbarred for irrelevant reasons of which skin colour is only one. The outstanding illustration is (to put it in its traditional form), that of a father who would object to his daughter's marrying a black man. But if his daughter does wish to marry a black man it is not because he is black but because he is John Smith, whom she loves, and if the father is to pronounce on the worthiness of potential husbands for his daughter it is not "a black man" but John Smith whom he must meet and judge.

There are no doubt many ways in which immigrants can be given a warmer welcome, and it is to be hoped that there will be plenty of new suggestions for specific measures of integration or education which can be considered and discussed. The burden of trying to ease the process of integration falls largely on those splendid bodies the voluntary liaison committees, whose members are the people on the spot and are in close touch with immigrants and can offer the advice and help most needed. These voluntary committees, together with the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, should be broadened to deal with aliens too, so that the problems of all kinds of immigrant can be properly tackled.

The first target should be the rootlessness of an immigrant on arrival. The provision of hostels to accommodate newly arrived immigrants for a short period would give those immigrants a chance to choose where they wanted to settle, and reduce the sense of urgency for putting a roof over their heads that now drives many of them straight into districts where people of their race already live. When they do settle, courses in the English language and English customs should be readily available for them. It is essential that immigrants are allowed to bring their families with them to lessen the feeling of isolation—as with free immigration they would be able to do—and they must be greeted with hospitality by the local community in which they take up residence and not be regarded as intruders. An immigrant should be received into a local organisation which is itself multi-racial, for if he feels obliged to run always to his former fellow-countrymen for social consolation, racial separatism and antagonism are bound to increase. When an immigrant encounters unfair discrimination he should talk about it to the members of the committee or other organisation to which he belongs and in particular to its native members. It must be emphasised that it is not the immigrant who is the outcast but the bigoted native; that

the immigrant is in alliance with enlightened natives in a crusade against race and colour prejudice.

Many more people in this country are prejudiced than will admit it, and because it is founded on irrational fear, it will not be cured by official condemnation but only by more contact between people as individuals and families. The Englishman who has a black friend will never again throw stones at "niggers." The black man made welcome is unlikely to heed an extremist call for black supremacy.

BOGUS PATRIOTISM

from an article by Andrew Alexander
in *The Daily Telegraph*

IT IS NOT NEW, of course, for governments to try to solve economic problems by a sort of secular prayer meeting. Once people laughed at the early Bolsheviks' continual exhortation to workers to overfulfil norms and indulge in all manner of Stakhanovite excesses. But in the past few years this has become the vogue in Britain, too.

The latest nonsense is "Quality and Reliability Year." The British poster industry has donated spaces to bills which idiotically demand of passers-by: "What are you doing about Quality and Reliability Year?"

What has got into the country that it is turning more and more to slogans and appeals to bogus patriotism? . . .

Seen calmly, it is absurd, is it not, that a government should urge businessmen to be efficient? That it should urge employees to step up their output? It is not usually necessary to ask dogs to bark or cats to mew. In a properly run economy it will *pay* to be efficient, *pay* to work hard. Inefficiency or idleness should be too costly to the individuals concerned. If these conditions do not prevail in the British economy then the fault lies with the government. It alone controls the whole paraphernalia of taxes and levies that should provide incentives to achievement and penalties for incompetence.

If our Victorian ancestors were to observe the contemporary scene, they would view proceedings with disbelief. Urge businessmen to be efficient? Surely that is equivalent to urging them to make more profits? Surely, they would say, human nature has not changed so much since our time that people have to be *asked* to do that. Human nature has not, of course, changed. The tax structure has . . .

What am I, a humble private soldier in this battle, doing about Quality and Reliability Year? Nothing personally, nor do I intend to. If my work declines in quality or reliability, regardless of any national campaign, I shall be demoted or sacked. If I improve in both I shall (I trust) get more pay. If tax takes so much that extra effort in these matters is not worthwhile, that is the government's fault, not mine. And if I take pride in my work, it is a personal, not a patriotic matter.