

aration extend to social activities in the school, but it is absurd to ignore such an obvious proposal.

Given that the difficulties of language are overcome, there is no reason to suppose that immigrant children are any slower to learn than native children, but the social backgrounds and customs of the various immigrant nationalities may differ from one another and from those of the English. To a large extent this can bring variety and interest to school life, but if there is a high proportion of immigrants in one school, particularly if they are predominantly of one race, the native children may take the lead from the immigrants rather than the immigrants from the natives. This will clearly be a serious obstacle to the assimilation of immigrants and will tend to perpetuate racial separatism. For this reason, the circular issued by the Department for Education and Science, exhorting local authorities to restrict the proportion of immigrants in their schools to one in three did not deserve the overwhelming criticism it received. There may be some dispute about who exactly are immigrants for this purpose (what about the Irish), and any set figure is bound to be arbitrary and subject to local variation, but the circular represented a brave if limited

Why Council Housing? —and Why Flats?

By T. O. EVANS

I OFTEN WONDER why no one ever questions the need for local authorities to build houses at all. It is understandable that in the absence of a more fundamental approach to poverty, those who cannot afford a house or flat of their own should be assisted in some way, but why should local authorities build houses and flats themselves?

Leaving aside for the moment the fact that many people in need cannot get a subsidised council house or flat and that many who do, have not the need of a subsidy, why cannot aid be given in such a way that people can, armed with their purchasing power, go into the open market for their housing needs? It would cost no more in the long run.

It may be thought that local authorities can build houses cheaper, yet in most cases the actual task of building houses and flats is left to private enterprise anyway. What, then, is the function of the local authority, apart from that of deciding on the nature of the accommodation to be built, who is to live in them, and what rents are to be paid? Do local authorities revel in the power given to them in planning and controlling council houses or would they be glad to get the whole worry off their shoulders?

The people to be housed have little choice of the manner in which they shall live. According to a survey carried out by Opinion Research Centre, the present housing wants of people are being completely ignored.

attempt to tackle the problem and was a step away from the former attitude of "do nothing" which has allowed difficulties and tensions to build up to dangerous levels.

The circular's defect was not that its principal aim was improper, but that it could be regarded at best as only a short-term expedient, since if local education authorities accepted its advice to re-arrange catchment areas or send immigrants to other schools by bus some of the consequences would be socially harmful. "We take the view," said an Inner London Education Authority sub-committee report, "that there is grave objection to any scheme that artificially injects into a school a large group of children from outside the neighbourhood, that divorces the child-in-school from his home surroundings and his local playmates and that would frustrate the authority's policy of encouraging parents to take an active part in school life—an important element in the integration of immigrant parents."

The correct solution lies in the dispersal of immigrants from the ghettos in which, all too often, they are huddled together—and this in turn, as was mentioned earlier, depends on other problems being tackled successfully.

The Sunday Times, May 21 reporting on the survey, stated that one in six of the homes now being built by local authorities in Britain are flats in tall blocks of ten stories and upwards. Yet only one person in a hundred wants to live in a block that high. Further, only one person in seven wants to live in a flat at all. People in Britain, according to the survey, want to live in houses. Of actual council tenants, nine out of ten want to live in a house!



Two thirds of the people in Britain would like to be owner-occupiers. The odd thing is that according to the survey, 64 per cent of the people are in favour of councils building houses for sale. Says *The Sunday Times*: "Most people, in other words, are prepared to consider a radical extension of government commitment in the field of housing—perhaps ultimately bringing housing on a par with education as a Government-controlled service."

Housing subsidies have undermined independence. Because local authorities provide cheaper accommodation, they presumably have the right to do the choosing. A survey into the reasons for the high cost of land for housing and the reasons for high taxation and the constant decline in the buying power of money might go a long way towards taking the housing problem off our hands altogether.