

home like the majority of consumers. And when one commodity ran short they were able to ration their members before the governments had invented food cards.

As for the more distant results, which can only be realized by the progressive absorption of industrial undertakings in proportion as the co-operative societies come to produce themselves all that they require, we have already mentioned these in describing the co-operative programme (pp. 363-366).

As regards the last items on this programme, of course the consumer's societies are still far from attaining their end: maybe they will never reach it. But at least it is not rash to assert that they are called upon to take an increasingly large place in the new economy, particularly in the lands that have to be reconstituted since the war. In fact, if it is true that the speeding-up of production is the urgent need of these countries that have been drained to the last drop, then no less urgent will be the need for a wise economy in consumption.

IV. HOUSING

Among all the kinds of expenditure, house-rent merits special study for two reasons: first, because of all private wants housing is the one of greatest *social* importance — greater even, from the social standpoint, than that of food; — and, secondly, because of all expenses this is the one that has increased most rapidly and that weighs most heavily on the pockets of the working classes and even of families in comfortable circumstances.

In ancient times the house was not only the home of the family but the altar of the household gods: so every man, rich or poor, had his own. Nowadays, when the exigencies of modern life have driven men back into a kind of nomadic existence, and they are no longer allowed to take root where they were born, the great majority of men live in hired houses. And the tendency of all the causes — social, economic, and political — that impel people to concentrate in the large towns — administrative centralization, large-scale production, railway development, and the growth of amusements — is constantly to increase rents, greatly to the profit of the urban landowner, but greatly to the injury of the public.

Most of the evils that afflict the working population — the loosening of the family tie, the public house habit, the early initiation into vice, the transmission of contagious diseases and epidemics — are the result for the most part of the shortage of house accommodation. Moreover, the dignity of life for man, and still more for

woman, is closely dependent upon a certain measure of home comfort.

Why, then, is it not the same with houses as with all other products, for which the supply generally follows the demand and sometimes even outstrips it? For is not a house simply a product of human industry — unlike land, streams of water, or mines? In a sense, yes; but yet there are two essential differences between the production of houses and that of other kinds of goods. These are as follows:

(1) A house can only be built on a particular plot of ground: now, building sites are so limited in number that the construction of a new house generally means pulling down an old one. That is why house-rent remains a monopoly price, limited only by the tenant's means.

The only effectual remedy would be a movement in the opposite direction to what has hitherto been the progress of development — that is to say, a stoppage of the growth of large towns, a return to the country districts of the people who have left them, and the restoration, as M. Luzzatti has said, of the worship of the household gods. In fact a certain amount of centrifugal movement is already to be observed in our large towns. This movement is accelerated by the development of cheap means of transport — motor buses, trams, and underground railways — which enable workers and employees to find healthier and less expensive accommodation far away from the middle of great cities. But the workers are not very fond of getting too far away from the urban centres — the land of public houses and the pictures.

(2) The production of houses, by which we mean the building industry, has not benefited by mechanical progress to the same extent as other kinds of industry. The methods of building are hardly any different or better to-day than they were in the time of the Romans.¹

It must be noticed also that all the regulations imposed upon builders in the interests of public health and sanitation — going so far even as the expropriation and demolition of insanitary dwellings — only increase the evil, however excellent they may be in themselves. In fact the severe conditions imposed upon builders are bound to have the effect of increasing the cost of new houses and thereby making them still more inaccessible to the poor. And of

¹ The housing problem has been intensified by the war in two ways: (1) by increasing the cost of construction very considerably; (2) by doubling the rate of interest, which reacts upon the rate of rent.

course if we go to the extreme of pulling down old houses, that means diminishing their number as well.

Can a solution be found in fixing rents, as food prices were fixed during the war, and for the same reason, namely, that it is a question of satisfying an indispensable need? But between the case of bread and that of houses there is this essential difference: that the baker is a merchant, who makes bread only to sell it, whereas the owner of a house can always refuse to let it. No doubt if we assume the letting to be already accomplished and the tenant in possession, the law can reduce the rent or even abolish it entirely; something of this sort has already been done during the war. But the problem is to find houses for those who are without them; and such a remedy as this is bound to diminish the supply for the future, for if rent were abolished it is obvious that no one would any longer build houses to let: the rich alone would have houses built to live in themselves.

There seems nothing for it, then, but to appeal to the collaboration of all the factors of social progress — employers, philanthropists, institutions of public utility, mutual aid societies, municipalities, the State, and the interested parties themselves, organized in co-operative societies. From them must be demanded the requisite capital for the erection of as many houses as possible, in the most economical manner; they must relinquish all profit, and be content with a moderate rate of interest, so as to reduce rents to the actual cost price of the houses.

All these methods have, in fact, been already employed, as follows:

(1) Very many houses have been built for their workpeople by employers or companies, in the form of *workmen's towns*. This has not been done entirely from philanthropic motives, but because factories and mines situated at a distance from large centres of population are unable to obtain workers unless they can be assured of accommodation.

Some of these towns in England and the United States are marvels of comfort, hygiene, and even artistic arrangement.

But this method only touches the fringe of the housing problem, for it is in cities and not in the country that the problem is most acute.

(2) *Co-operative building societies* have been formed by the workers themselves, generally with the aid of philanthropic capitalists. They buy the land themselves, have the houses built, and sell or let them at cost price to such of their members as want them. But in America and England the majority of these societies do not themselves undertake the building: they simply lend money for the pur-

pose, in very ingenious and very economical ways. These loans, being perfectly secured, serve as investments for the savings of those members who are compelled to wait a long time for their turn to be housed, or of those — and they are the largest number — who have no intention of becoming owners; so that these societies act as savings-banks even more than as building societies.¹

(3) Philanthropic capitalists can also assist in the construction of houses, either in their lifetime, by lending capital without interest or at a small interest, to *building societies*; or else after their death, in the form of *foundations*. This is perhaps the most useful way in which a man can employ his wealth, from the social point of view, and it imposes only the minimum of sacrifice upon him. But unfortunately it is only too uncommon.

(4) Lastly, the solution of the housing problem can be aided by the *municipalities* and the *State*, either directly, by the actual building of houses, or indirectly, by giving assistance to building societies. Given the seriousness of the situation of the tenant — a situation that contains, maybe, the seeds of revolution — it certainly seems that from the public authorities alone can the necessary effort be forthcoming.

Many towns in England, Germany, and Switzerland have already adopted this method. They have been driven to do so by the circumstances just described: they have shut up insanitary houses, and have therefore found it necessary to replace them. In England, when the death rate in any area exceeds a certain figure, the municipal authority pulls down the houses and replaces them by new ones which it lets at cost price. Now that the war is over, England is intending to make an extraordinary effort to ensure proper housing accommodation for the families of the hundreds of thousands of men who fought or died for their country.²

¹ In France in 1912 there were only 400 or 500 co-operative or philanthropic building societies. They were all very small, and in some twenty years had built, at the outside, only £6,000,000-worth of houses (say, enough to accommodate about 20,000 families).

² All this can only yield results in the distant future: so those who are impatient — and there are many who have every right to be — are demanding that the municipal authorities should take immediate possession of all houses. This revolutionary solution would obviously not increase the number of houses. But it would enable a larger number of people to find accommodation, by rationing the number of rooms occupied by each household. It would also lower rents, whether the expropriation was carried out without compensation to the owners, or whether it was done at the expense of the ratepayers.