

Housing Experts Meet

By THE STROLLING REPORTER

THERE is no place this reporter knows of where so much misinformation can be handed out on housing and economics as at a meeting of housing experts.

In strolling around the country he walked in on the Tenth Annual Meeting of the National Association of Housing Officials at Baltimore. The Association is comprised largely of persons in the various local Housing Authorities throughout the country. They all have one purpose in life—to impress the Federal Government that their cities, towns and villages are filled with slums and that the occupants are dying of all sorts of diseases and the children becoming juvenile delinquents; that the only way to redeem the situation is for the Government to provide adequate funds to build houses and rent them at a price the people can afford to pay, *i.e.*, not more than one-fifth of their annual income; that this housing is to include not alone shelter but gas, electricity, heat and hot water and mechanical refrigeration; and that the difference between the income and the maintenance cost is to come from subsidies by the National and Local Governments.

This year these experts received little consideration from the speakers who were largely interested in winning the war.

The chief of the Housing Priorities Branch of the War Production Board spoke on "Getting Critical Materials." His paper was an excellent outline of the war situation and the need for the utilization of all available materials in the turning out of ships, guns, ammunition and the providing of housing in the defense areas where new plants are being erected to turn out needs for the Army. He made it clear that the housers could not expect any material for construction of civilian housing. He also pointed out that if there was a housing shortage it would be necessary to utilize every existing dwelling to its full capacity even if it became necessary to billet workers with families for the duration of the war.

Some of the experts wanted to know whether this attitude of the Federal Authorities would not tend to reduce the standard of living. They were advised that no matter how low the standard fell it still would be higher than that of the soldiers living in the trenches or sleeping in the mud in the open field!

The WPB speaker also pointed out that there is an extreme shortage of all necessary materials even for war requirements. A wag inquired whether he was not justified in observing that there was a shortage of everything except housing experts.

Later on, when another speaker called attention to the shortage of wiring for electricity and pipe for plumbing, the same apostate inquired whether some of the experts in Washington have not suggested the use of wireless electricity and pipeless plumbing, and whether some experts may not ask for an appropriation of \$25,000,000 to investigate the possibility of pipeless plumbing and wireless electricity.

A speaker who claimed to be the originator of the National Association of Housing Officials, to show what a good citizen he was, announced that all the members of the Association believe strongly in the Capitalistic System and then proceeded at once to expound on the wonders and values of subsidized housing and demanded that the Government proceed to construct new housing throughout the country, declaring that the cost would be much less than what is now being spent on the war.

An economist connected with the Federal Reserve System spoke on a plan of wiping out slums and rebuilding our cities without governmental financing or subsidies. He proposed that local governments buy up all the run-down areas of their communities. He said real estate values have fallen to such an extent that much of the property is a loss both to the owners and to the financial institutions holding the mortgages. These properties, he held, could be bought at about one-third of the present value. The buildings were to be demolished and the land rented to those who desire to rebuild and the owners paid back over a period of sixty years. In this way, he said, land speculation would be eliminated. He was the only speaker who in any way connected land speculation with housing.

Another speaker who has an international reputation as an analyst and who holds a high position in one of our leading universities painted a glorious verbal picture of this country after peace was declared. He promised that poverty and crime would be eliminated and all would enjoy the full bounties of nature. There would be good housing, plenty of nourishing food, automobiles, shorter hours and enjoyment and recreation in the interest of health. He also declared that we would become international and that all trade barriers between the countries would be eliminated. There would be freedom of the seas and freedom of exchange so that goods would be sold without any interference by national governments.

He did not explain how this would be accomplished. He did, however, point out that since we have all the natural resources necessary for the fulfillment of all normal desires the American people would live on a higher standard than they had ever anticipated. It is unfortunate that he failed to point out how the people could acquire these natural resources without first paying someone for the right to dig out of Mother Earth all the necessities of life.

There is a growing movement on the part of economists and experts to make promises to the American people without fully advising them as to how it can be accomplished. The same speaker promised that when peace comes the farmers will receive more for their product, manufacturers more for their production, labor higher wages, rents will be lower and costs to the consumer will be reduced. Several in the audience grinned and remarked to one another, "He'll have to do it with mirrors!"