

meant that some 28,000 people were in dire need of new homes as far back as 1936. Stress was laid on the high rentals charged compared with the low wages received by the occupants, on incongruous subdivisions and the variety of densities in the areas covered, the greatest of which was about 50 houses per acre. The Board also drew attention to the higher incidence of infectious diseases and infant mortality in inner suburbs compared with suburbs further out. This factual report, notable for the strength of its language in condemning the conditions investigated, had its effect. The Housing Commission of Victoria was constituted soon afterwards with the main purpose of redeveloping these blighted areas.

The third expert body carried a much wider responsibility. This was the Commonwealth Housing Commission, which produced its voluminous report in 1944. Of housing in the large towns and capital cities it stated:

"The absence of satisfactory legal enactments during the early development of our large towns, either regarding the subdivision and sale of land or the construction and standard of dwellings allowed speculators to exploit the people's urgent need for housing. The continued rapid growth of most towns, particularly the capital cities, with the general neglect of any ordered plans governing their growth as entities, or regard for correctly placing industries in relation to where the people who worked in them would have to live, has accentuated the evils of bad housing. This state of affairs has allowed the unscrupulous builders and the investor, greedy for profit, to exploit a large number of the people, who have been helpless to do anything but compete for the insufficient supply of housing in positions where it was necessary for them to live. The inevitable results have been high rents for bad housing, overcrowding, and the continued use of housing which should be demolished."

While conditions in these inner suburban areas of Melbourne are not as bad as in cities of the Old World, or even in some of the older cities of America, nevertheless the situation demands positive and energetic action. With the appointment of the Housing Commission, the State Government accepted responsibility for bringing about better conditions in the blighted areas of the city. It is unfortunate that the war years and their aftermath have retarded progress in this direction, for with housing becoming older as the years pass the problem becomes greater and more urgent.

Undoubtedly much of the work of rebuilding of these areas will have to be done by the Housing Commission, but there is no reason why, as in America, large private organisations should not play their part. However the work is done, the aim should be to re-house under proper living conditions at least the same number of people as are living there at present. There would be some advantage in housing a somewhat greater number. Believing that it is better to err on the conservative side, it is envisaged that the population of this central district will be held substantially at its present figure and not permitted to decline further.

Existing population densities within these inner suburbs are generally substantially above the density attainable with single family dwellings on the minimum sized allotments prescribed by municipal by-laws. This is mainly because many homes are already built on allotments smaller than the minimum. If the population is to be maintained in these areas, the form of housing must be such that it will achieve residential densities ranging from 40 to 80 persons an acre and averaging about 53 an acre. It will be seen from Table I that this cannot be accomplished with the detached or semi-detached single family dwelling alone. Row housing, walk-up flats and elevator flats must be used as well.

When the high land values are taken into account, even single family dwellings in the modern style would be too costly for many who would desire to live here. The solution of the problem would seem to be row housing for those who would normally require single family dwellings, walk-up flats for those in the lower income groups who desire flats or who can be satisfactorily provided for in this way — usually single people and families of two or three — and elevator flats for those in the higher income groups who wish to live near the city centre and who are prepared to pay for this more costly form of accommodation.

The provisions of the planning scheme have been designed, therefore, to encourage the use of these forms of housing with special emphasis on elevator flats in certain selected areas totalling 750 acres, and on row-housing and walk-up flats over much of the remainder of the inner residential areas. In this way it is hoped to encourage the redevelopment of these areas so that they will be able to play their rightful part in the housing of the population.

REDEVELOPMENT

Proper redevelopment of a really decadent area rarely, if ever, comes about, except in accordance with a comprehensive plan. This plan may be that of a public planning or housing authority, or of a large private enterprise such as an insurance company. Small, unrelated building is generally a hindrance rather than a help to redevelopment.

Large areas around the core of the city are today in urgent need of redevelopment. The task involved is a big one, and there is urgent need of vigorous and positive action to bring to bear on the problem the full resources of public and private enterprise working in conjunction. The Housing Commission was appointed originally for the purpose of slum abolition and redevelopment, and is fully competent to carry out the detailed planning and to organise the construction work. But something more is necessary. Redevelopment should be closely integrated with all the other aspects of civic improvement, and the work should be carried out in close co-operation and consultation with a metropolitan planning authority.

Because of the immensity of the task and the slight chance of any major change being made in these inner areas in the immediate future, it was not considered expedient for the Board's planning scheme to cover this feature of redevelopment. But redevelopment is urgent and must be done. If it is to be properly woven into the pattern of future civic development, then a metropolitan planning authority should proceed, without delay, with the basic planning which is an essential preliminary to the more detailed planning of new housing schemes.

However, the present planning scheme does provide for certain special redevelopment zones in areas where the redevelopment of adjoining areas should go hand in hand with road widening or road deviation proposals. In cases such as the widening of the road bottlenecks at Bridge Road, Richmond, and at High Street and Wellington Street, St. Kilda, it is obvious that much, if not all, of the cost of resumption of the additional land required for road purposes could be recouped to the community if a greater area than that immediately necessary for road widening were resumed, re-subdivided by the civic authorities and redeveloped either by public or private organisations. In the case of Sydney Road, Brunswick, where provision has been made for a by-pass route, not only do the similar circumstances exist, but over a substantial portion of the route the exact location can be fixed only in conjunction with a scheme of redevelopment. These aspects will be further referred to later.

The urgent and immediate problem is to ensure that nothing shall be done which will make an already difficult task more difficult to undertake when the need arises. In all these cases, therefore, appropriate adjacent areas have been designated as redevelopment zones and conditions framed to ensure that future building can be controlled to ensure conformity with an overall scheme for their re-development. It has not been considered part of the Board's present responsibility to draw up definite proposals for the detailed re-planning of the areas.

LAND SUBDIVISION

Reference has already been made to the problem created in the inner suburban areas by the numerous allotments below the minimum standard.

In the outer areas another problem exists — the haphazard and unco-ordinated subdivision of land by individual owners and the lack of provision in plans of subdivision for properly located community facilities.

Many municipalities have done everything possible within their limited powers, but the subdivision in the past of vast areas into an uninteresting and monotonous rectangular grid pattern with badly located shopping centres, and the absence in many districts of sufficient open space to meet the needs of local residents are all indicative of the inadequacy of the existing control of land subdivision.

"The subdivision in the past of vast areas . . . into a . . . rectangular grid pattern"

