

# THE MINISTRY OF BUILDING

## MR. ATTLEE'S STATEMENT

MR. ATTLEE, the Lord Privy Seal, in the House of Commons, made the following statement about the duties of the new Ministry of Works and Buildings:—

The Ministry of Works and Buildings will be responsible for the erection of all new civil works and buildings required by any other Government Department. It will take over to begin with the whole organisation of H.M. Office of Works, including their present responsibilities for the erection of buildings and other Civil Departments and for Service Departments, and the work of the Ministry of Supply, including the new buildings section of the Ordnance Factories and the approval of plans of new private factories or extensions of existing private factories, to the cost of which the Ministry of Supply is contributing.

Highly specialised work at present carried out by the Service Departments, either by direct labour or through contractors (such as the civil engineering works of the Admiralty, the construction of aerodromes or aerodrome buildings, fortification and defence works), and work overseas will remain with the Service Departments.

The responsibility for maintenance and repairs of buildings and equipment in use by the Service Departments or the Ministry of Supply will remain with those Departments, except in so far as a transfer to the Ministry of Works and Buildings may be mutually agreed to be convenient.

The Ministry of Works and Buildings will be responsible for the licensing of private building, and for determining the priority of proposals for rebuilding buildings damaged by air raids.

The Ministry of Works and Buildings may arrange by agreement with the Service Departments or the Ministry of Aircraft Production to erect on their behalf new works and buildings not of a highly specialised character such as stores or depots or houses and buildings of an architectural nature, and for the super-private factories or the extension of existing private factories required for war production.

The Production Council will lay down the general order of priority of building work. The Minister will be a member of the Production Council and responsible for the Works and Buildings Priority Committee. He will determine the application of the directions of the Production Council to the priority of particular buildings, subject to appeal, if necessary, to the Council.

The Minister will be empowered to call on all Departments retaining responsibility for the erection and maintenance of buildings and works of construction (including Departments concerned with work carried out by or on behalf of local authorities or public utility undertakings) to furnish from time to time such information as he may require as to the present and prospective demands of themselves and their contractors for labour and materials and any points ancillary thereto.

The Minister will be responsible for such control or central purchase of building materials not at present controlled as may be necessary.

The Minister will take steps to institute

research into such questions as the adoption of substitutes for building materials which are in short supply, or the modification of designs and specifications with a view to expedition, and to ensure that the results of past and future research are promptly communicated to all concerned. For this purpose he will make full use of the building research organisation of D.S.I.R. He will be empowered to call on Departments retaining responsibility for building to satisfy him that they are making full use of the results of research in this connection.

It is clear that the reconstruction of town and country after the war raises great problems and gives a great opportunity. The Minister of Works and Buildings has therefore been charged by the Government with the responsibility of consulting the departments and organisations concerned with a view to reporting to the Cabinet the appropriate methods and machinery for dealing with the issues involved.

### The Debate.

MR. SHINWELL asked whether the division of functions which the right hon. gentleman had referred to in his statement would not lead to considerable overlapping. Would it not be desirable to effect rather more co-ordination in respect of planning for building purposes? Secondly, if they were to wait until the end of the war for a report by the First Commissioner of Works on the buildings required to provide for the civilian population, what was to be done now to provide the civilian accommodation required? Was there to be any planning undertaken for the civilian population during the war?

Mr. Attlee said that it was not possible to debate this subject by question and answer; but he did not understand why the hon. gentleman assumed that nothing was to be done immediately. There was no question of waiting till after the war, and there was no division of functions except that certain technical officers would remain with the Service Ministries for obvious reasons.

Replying further to Mr. Shinwell, Mr. Attlee agreed that it would be highly desirable that an early opportunity should be given for a debate on this matter.

MR. A. HOPKINSON: Can the right hon. gentleman tell us the exact meaning of the term "control of buildings of an architectural nature"?

MR. ATTLEE: I think it means buildings of some architectural merit; many buildings have none.

MR. LAWSON asked if the right hon. gentleman was aware that if these matters were left in the hands of the Service Departments there would still be conflict of tenders and competition for labour. This would leave the position exactly where it was.

MR. ATTLEE: Hon. members would do well to study the statement. What the hon. member has said is directly contrary to the statement. There is full power given to the Minister as regards priority and control. The point he makes only affects the carrying out of certain technical functions.

SIR W. DAVISON asked if the right hon. gentleman would assure the House that

there would be no immediate ban on the replacement of urgent buildings which had been destroyed and that the work could be put in hand at once if necessary.

MR. ATTLEE: That is one of the objects of the proposals; but in view of the limited amount of materials and labour it is quite clear that there must be a decision on priorities and as to what buildings shall be replaced first.

## EMERGENCY INQUIRY BUREAU

Questions from readers arising out of War-time difficulties and recent Emergency legislation will be answered by a special staff of contributors. Questions, which should be addressed to the Editor, should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope.

### Landlord's Obligations Under C.D. Act.

SIR,—I am a tenant of one of a block of six flats, all of which are at present in occupation. Under the Civil Defence Act it is laid down that the landlord must—should more than 50 per cent. of the tenants ask it—provide air raid shelter accommodation.

Three months ago five of the tenants asked the landlord to provide such shelter, but no satisfaction has been received.

Can we compel the landlord to implement his obligation, and, if so, how; failing this, are we legally entitled to terminate our leases?

A correspondent writes:—

The inquirer is right. The landlord may, and if required by more than one-half of the occupiers must, prepare a scheme. But it must be remembered that the provision only applies to buildings in the areas in which factories, mines and commercial buildings are required to provide air-raid shelters; and the Minister of Home Security has specified these areas.

No provision appears to have been made for forcing the landlord to comply with the tenant's requirements. It would be possible to go to the court for a *mandamus* to compel the landlord to provide the shelter; but the easiest and cheapest and most effective way is to lay the whole matter before the Minister of Home Security.

It should be stated that the landlord on compliance can increase the rent by (a) the expense in providing the shelter plus (b) the amount paid by the landlord to any person whose property is adversely affected as compensation. This total is then divided between the occupants in proportion to the annual value of the part of the building they occupy, and their annual rent is then increased by one-eighth of the share apportioned to each. Such increase of rent does not operate for more than ten years.

The inquirer certainly would not be entitled to terminate his lease. No such provision has been made in any Act; except, where premises have suffered war damage. And, speaking generally, the inquirer would run a great risk if he vacated the premises in the circumstances suggested above.

### Extension of Measurements Problem.

SIR,—I shall be extremely grateful if you will kindly settle an argument with my associates as regards extension of measurements. The problem is, we have measured various parts of a job overall, plus an eighth then deducted for glass as hereunder:—

10 ft. Window sash plus 1/8

12 ft. D/d.

No. 12. Squares.

Should the extension read:—

120 ft. + 1/8 = 135 ft. D/d 56 ft.

= Ans. = 79 ft. sup. and 1/8

# BUNKS FOR SHELTERS

THE following report has been issued by the A.R.P. Committee of the A.A.S.T.A.:—

The decision of the Ministry of Home Security to provide one million bunks for shelters was a welcome one. But hopes that at last a new leaf had been turned over were dashed when the designs for these bunks were issued to local authorities. It became evident that the old faults—lack of intelligent planning and petty economy—were still present. As these bunks are even now in process of manufacture and there is no time to be lost if corrections are to be made, we are venturing to draw the attention of the public to the simple facts set out below.

One million people are going to spend probably a third of their time in these bunks for some months and perhaps for some years to come. If the designs are not altered two-thirds of these people (those occupying the two lower bunks) are going to lie in considerable and quite unnecessary discomfort.

Fig. A shows the official design as issued to local authorities. From this it will be seen that there are three bunks placed very closely one above the other. After the thickness of the mattresses has been allowed for it is doubtful if more than 16 in. of space will remain between the bunks, and this may well be less in many cases. This space is so restricted that it is impossible even to turn over without difficulty, and the sensation of lying in this cramped position is very unpleasant. It is also difficult to get into and out of the lower bunks easily in the space of only 17 in. between the boards forming the sides. At the same time it will be noticed that the person lying in the top bunk will have plenty of space above him (in the case of a shelter of the average height of 8 ft. there will be 4 ft. 2 in. of space). There is therefore obviously a very good case for increasing the spacing between the bunks and by this simple means insuring the future comfort of hundreds of thousands of people.

We suggest that the bottom bunk should be 1 ft. 3 in. from the ground and that there should be a minimum spacing of 2 ft. 3 in.

between the bunks. (See Fig. C). This is still less than the spacing normally adopted in railway sleepers, but can be considered reasonable. The Ministry's reply to such a proposal is understood to be that the bunks have been standardised for mass production to fit in the lowest shelter and that the extra expense involved would be too great. In reply to this, however, we would point out, first, that the spacing is too close for health and comfort; secondly, there is no reason why several different types should not be standardised for different heights of shelter; and finally, the extra cost involved in providing bunks of the type we propose would certainly not exceed sixpence to ninepence per head. Surely this small additional expenditure is well worth while.

In the Ministry's design the middle bunk is supposed to let down to make the back of a seat which is formed by the bottom bunk (Fig. B). But this seat is only 6 in. off the floor, is very narrow, and the back will slope at an awkward angle. In our proposed design (Figs. C and D) the height of the bottom bunk is at a convenient level for a seat and there is space for the middle bunk to let down into the proper position for a back to this seat.

The revised spacing of bunks can be adopted even in shelters which are only 7 ft. high (see Figs. E and F). In this case the bottom bunk will be only 6 in. off the ground, so that in order to form a seat at a convenient level the middle bunk will be made removable and can be placed at a lower level to form a seat.

It may be necessary in the case of the revised spacing to provide one or two rungs for access to the upper bunks, but the cost of doing this would be very small and would in our opinion be fully justified.

In some shelters the Ministry propose to instal wider bunks on the lowest level to sleep two people each. We believe that in public or communal shelters and where children are present this will be open to very grave objections on grounds of health and morality.

