

PART II.—HOUSING ACCOUNT

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF HOUSING CONSTRUCTION

“ I have pleasure in submitting the following report on the activities and operations of the Department of Housing Construction for the year ended 31st March, 1943.

“ 1. *Curtailment of Housing Construction.*—Drastic restrictions have necessarily been imposed upon the Department's activities as a consequence of war conditions, and, as pointed out in my last annual report, it has been necessary to make available for defence work all of the man-power of the Housing Department and to curtail all private and unessential building not directly connected with the war effort.

“ 2. *Purchase of Land.*—Notwithstanding the aforesaid difficulties, however, the Department has continued to purchase land suitable for housing purposes so that when the necessity has passed for actual war works construction there will be ample land available for an accentuated and vigorous building programme. During the past year 7,412 building-sites have been purchased, this bringing the number of sites acquired to date up to a total of 35,784.

“ The number of serviced sections available for purchase is, naturally, limited, and the Department considers that it should not unduly deplete it if private building is to make its contribution in overcoming the housing shortage.

“ In order to be prepared for the post-war building programme we should have on hand enough land for at least two years' requirements, say, thirty thousand sections. The policy of purchasing land two years ahead of building requirements is necessary in order to allow time for surveying and planning of subdivisions, and also the construction of the roads and the installation of all services before house construction can efficiently commence.

“ 3. *Architectural.*—With the curtailment of normal housing contracts, the architectural staff has been fully engaged on the provision of accommodation for the various war services and munition workers in buildings adapted from ordinary standard multi-unit types, which will be convertible for civilian housing at the conclusion of the war.

“ Extensive experiments have also been carried out in prefabrication, and the satisfactory results achieved encourage us to expect that, as soon as war requirements have been met, this form of construction will materially assist in the Department's post-war programme.

“ 4. *Standards.*—The high standards of accommodation and construction adopted at the inception of the scheme have been adhered to. The intention of the Department in adopting these standards was to make a useful and substantial contribution towards the improvement of the living-conditions of the community and also to provide an enduring asset for the State. The popularity of the State Rental Housing Scheme leaves no doubt as to the success of the methods adopted.

“ 5. *Housing Improvement.*—The Dominion has not as yet reached the stage where slum conditions have become a major problem, but in some of our cities badly planned areas, with buildings of a poor type, are causing municipal and Health authorities some concern.

“ It is hoped that the post-war housing programme will include measures designed to remove or improve all structures that do not conform to certain minimum standards. The Department has already carried out investigations on this phase of the Dominion's housing problem, and if legislation is necessary to carry these proposals into effect, this will doubtless have the early attention of the Government.

“ 6. *Manpower.*—In viewing rehabilitation from another angle, it is obvious that building, among all the industries, is probably best able to absorb quickly a large number of employees, and the expanded housing programme will provide secure employment on work which will become a national asset.

“ A proportion of the returned men will be experienced building tradesmen, but the majority will be unskilled. While a considerable amount of unskilled labour will be necessary, particularly in the initial stages, preparations must be made for the training of men for various trades allied to the building industry, as any successful scheme for rehabilitation will depend largely on an