

VIII. TOWN-PLANNING

The problem of housing an increasing population raises very large issues as to the distribution of that population. The State Advances Corporation in their evidence made the following important comment :

In discussing a problem of this nature it is appropriate that reference should be made to the wider issues of developing a policy which will encourage and enable the better distribution of the population throughout the country, and prevent, if possible, any further trend towards the aggregation of population within the larger city areas. It is understood that schemes are already under consideration for decentralizing industry and the provision of housing for the personnel to be engaged in industries that are to be transferred to rural or semi-rural districts. That is a matter that can be materially assisted by the Government in arranging its housing schemes. It is necessary, of course, to synchronize the movement of industry with the establishment of new housing settlements, but with proper co-ordination of the activities of the Departments concerned this objective should be reasonably obtainable.

In another section of this report we have discussed at some length the problem of the growth of the larger cities of the Dominion. It has been further pointed out in the section dealing with housing that over 60 per cent. of the applications for State houses come from residents within the four main urban areas. The tendency for the growth of the Auckland Metropolitan Area and the Wellington Metropolitan Area respectively has already been commented on. As far as Wellington is concerned, a limit is being reached to the possible expansion. At the present time many people have to travel long distances to their work, and if many more large industries are located within the Wellington area there is little doubt that the potential residential areas will need to be pushed farther out. In Auckland the means of access between the various parts of the metropolitan area are perhaps rather simpler than in the Wellington area, but here again the growth of the metropolitan area is such as to give cause for serious concern as to the future general amenities of the district. Evidence has been forthcoming from a number of quarters that some industries, particularly of the lighter type, are concerned with the possibility of transferring at least some of their activities to the secondary towns. This tendency is in operation in Canterbury and Otago, where, we understand that some factories engaged in boot and clothing manufacturing have transferred a portion of their activities to small rural towns in order to tap the female labour available there. There is also evidence that some Wellington firms are considering transferring some of their activities to one of the Wairarapa towns, while in the Auckland district there has been some similar development in the Thames and Whangarei areas. The Planning Branch of the Ministry of Works makes this comment :—

While . . . a national survey of resources would be of considerable assistance in assessing the principal shifts of population, no really accurate estimates of the progressive changes of population in particular areas could be made while industry which is foot-loose is free to establish itself where it chooses. Experience has shown, in fact, that when no effort is made to influence or guide the location of industry of this type it tends to cluster about existing main centres. This can be seen in the phenomenal growth of Auckland and Wellington in recent years. Whatever may be the sociological, cultural, and economic disadvantages of such a process, the town-planner is committed in those circumstances to give effect in as orderly a way as possible to influences which are largely unpredictable and work at haphazard. Other countries, particularly Britain and Australia, have announced an intention to take positive action to influence the growth of towns and to limit their size, and Britain has already taken certain legislative steps to that end. There is a general recognition of the fact that the key to rational urban development is guidance of the location of industry. Without some such guidance in New Zealand the present tendency for a disproportionately large part of new industry to be established in the main centres will, no doubt, continue, and if there were a substantial increase in population, whether from immigration or otherwise, there would be a similar disproportionate drift following industry. This tendency towards concentration of population, which has been condemned in Britain and Australia, is even more undesirable in New Zealand. The demand in this country for the individual house, set in its own garden, brought about very low average population densities in our cities. While this development avoids some of the evils inherent in the congested industrial towns of Britain, it raises other problems of equal complexity. For example, the convenient location of industry, shops, and recreation facilities is made much more difficult, and the cost of services is, by comparison, very high. . . . Owing to our sprawling type of development, the larger proportion of our workers are compelled to live at far too great a distance from their places of work. The resultant waste of time involved in transport alone is becoming an increasing drag as our main cities continue to sprawl out over the countryside. . . . Under an active policy of decentralization of industry to towns in the South Island and to such North Island towns as Hamilton, Palmerston North, New Plymouth, Napier, and Hastings, a substantial increase of population could be absorbed much more satisfactorily. . . . These districts would then retain much good human material which now tends to be exported to the main centres or overseas.