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NEW TOWNS AND WORKERS' HOUSING:

THE ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION

(Document submitted by the International
Labour Organization)

Introduction

1. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has since its beginning recognized that adequate housing is an integral part of high living standards.
2. One of the obligations of the International Labour Organisation as set forth in the Declaration of Philadelphia is that of furthering among the nations of the world "programmes which will achieve ... the provision of adequate ... housing". Adequate housing will contribute to the attainment of the conditions in which it will be possible for "all human beings ... to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and in equal opportunity".
3. It has become increasingly recognized that town, country and regional planning are essential to ensure that workers' housing programmes are well conceived and carried out. Housing is not built in a vacuum, but for a living community. With housing are also built streets, water supply and

sewerage facilities, schools, health centres, recreational and shopping facilities. To ensure that the construction of housing and community facilities meets the real needs of man is the primary function of town and country planning.

Town, country and regional planning: general principles

4. Interest in town and country planning has grown rapidly since the Second World War for several reasons. First, workers want and should be enabled to live in decent housing appropriately situated in relation both to their place of work and to facilities for health, transport, education, shopping and recreation. Secondly, town and country planning is required to preserve for posterity various amenities which might otherwise disappear as a result of uncontrolled building development. Thirdly, although land is still relatively abundant in some parts of the world, there is in other regions a shortage of land for many purposes. In the latter areas, hardly any economic activity - new housing, new public works, new shopping facilities, new factories, new farms, new recreational sites, to mention only some of the most important land uses - can be expanded without conflicting with other activities for the use of the same plot of land.

5. In June 1961, the International Labour Conference at its 45th Session adopted the Workers' Housing Recommendation which contains the following general principle:

"The development and execution of workers' housing programmes should conform to sound town, country and regional planning practice".^{1/}

6. The First ILO European Regional Conference in 1955 adopted a comprehensive recommendation with respect to town and country planning in its Resolution concerning Housing Construction, as follows:

1/ ILO: Official Bulletin, Vol. XLIV, No.1, 1961, p.8.

"Comprehensive town and country planning is indispensable in the development and execution of ... housing programmes, so as to ensure that proper use is made of existing land and that the housing requirements of the population in relation both to places of work and to facilities for health, transport, education, shopping, recreation, etc. are taken into account".^{1/}

7. The Third Asian Regional Conference also emphasized the importance of town and country planning in its Resolution concerning Workers' Housing adopted in 1953:

"It is recommended that steps should be taken to develop new and powerful incentives to stimulate workers and their co-operatives to improve their housing conditions, for instance by ... the provision of well-planned community layouts ..."^{2/}

8. The Building, Civil Engineering and Public Works Committee has similarly emphasized the importance of town and country planning in its Resolution concerning National Housing Programmes and Full Employment adopted at its Fifth Session in 1956:

"Adequate town and country planning ... is most desirable for the realization of housing programmes and the ensuring of continuous full employment".^{3/}

9. The Coal Mines Committee at its Second Session also made a strong recommendation concerning the importance of preparing workers' housing projects within the over-all framework of modern town planning:

"In order to raise the average level of the housing conditions of miners and their families, the construction of dwellings, whatever the pressure of immediate needs, should always be

1/ Ibid., Vol. XXXVIII, No.2, 1955, p.91.

2/ Ibid., Vol. XXXVI, No.4, 1953, p.88.

3/ Ibid., Vol. XXXIX, No.7, 1956, p.425.

conceived as part of a general programme related to the best rules of modern town planning as well as to considerations of beauty, comfort, and the preferences of the local mining communities".^{1/}

Urban decentralization and new towns

10. The case for urban dispersal and industrial decentralization is cogent, particularly in the less industrialized parts of the world. In small communities land is cheap and the labour of the family can be used for some or all of the work of house building and maintenance. It is, therefore, economic to build houses on a one-floor plan in small or medium-sized communities, thus encouraging the use of locally available, short-life materials and unskilled labour - often on a self-help basis - whereas in large cities, building will usually be on the basis of multi-storey high-cost construction from permanent materials. Outside urban concentrations, public facilities such as streets, transport systems, schools, water supply and sewage disposal, can be reasonably adequate when provided on a simple, and in some cases even rather primitive, scale. In large cities adequate public facilities are not only more crucial for the health and welfare of the population, but also require a far greater investment per head in physical and financial resources.

11. It is clear, therefore, that, particularly in the less industrialized countries, the limited physical resources available for housing and related facilities can, in general, go farther in improving living conditions when they are used in building new towns and villages. Such a policy also fits well with the regional developmental programmes that are being increasingly planned in all parts of the world.

^{1/} Resolution concerning Problems of Miners' Housing, ILO : The International Labour Code, 1951 (Geneva, 1952), Vol.II, p.457.

12. In the Workers' Housing Recommendation adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1961 the following suggestion is made:

"In order to lessen overcrowding in large urban centres, plans for future development should be formulated on a regional basis, with a view to preventing over-concentration of industry and population and to achieving a better balance between urban and rural development".^{1/}

13. The Third Asian Regional Conference in its Resolution concerning Workers' Housing adopted in 1953 stressed the value of urban decentralization:

"The implementation of a policy of urban decentralization will facilitate the improvement of housing conditions by lessening overcrowding and by extending the scope for short-life housing".^{2/}

14. The Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories has also given support to the principle of decentralization in its Resolution concerning Workers' Housing as follows:

"In long-term planning policy in territories where the demand for urban housing is outstripping the supply of suitable available land, consideration should be given to the encouragement of satellite towns, with appropriate transport facilities to enable workers to get to and from work cheaply, thus arresting the unwieldy growth of existing cities".^{3/}

The siting of workers' housing and new industrial plants in new towns

15. A well organized city, pleasant to live in, cannot be produced by haphazard growth and concentration. However, it is not sufficient merely to avoid mistakes in siting housing and community facilities; from the

^{1/} ILO, Official Bulletin, Vol.XLIV, No.1. 1961, p.15.

^{2/} Ibid., Vol. XXXVI, No.4, 1953, p.88.

^{3/} ILO, : Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories, G.B. 124/5/3, 1954, p.23.

social and economic points of view it is desirable that their location should coincide as far as possible with the most efficient use of the resources of the country concerned.

16. In the Workers' Housing Recommendation, the International Labour Conference has made four specific suggestions regarding the siting of workers' housing, as follows:

"In the design of houses and the planning of new communities for workers, every effort should be made to consult those bodies representative of future occupants best able to advise on the most suitable means of meeting their housing and environmental needs.

"The siting of workers' housing should take into consideration the possibility of air pollution from factories, and topographical conditions which may have an important bearing on the disposal of surface run-off and of sewage and other wastes.

"In the construction of short-life housing it is particularly important to ensure community planning and control over density of occupancy.

"It is desirable to adopt the principle of providing in towns and cities for inter-related zones, such as residential, commercial and industrial zones, with a view to ensuring as agreeable an environment as possible for the worker and his family and to minimizing the time spent and risks incurred by workers in going to and from work".^{1/}

17. The Iron and Steel Committee has also made detailed suggestions concerning the siting of new plants. "In choosing the site for a new plant, in addition to technical and economic factors due regard should be had to such considerations as:

^{1/} ILO: Official Bulletin, Vol. XLIV, No.1, 1961, pp.14-15.

- (a) the possibility of building housing for the workers in a healthy area within easy access of the plant;
- (b) the planning of the plant and of the residential area in such a way as to reduce to the minimum nuisance to residents resulting from the smoke, gas and noise from the plant;
- (c) the layout of the plant and of the residential area in such a way as to ensure easy communication between them;
- (d) the planning of the environment of the plant in a manner as attractive as possible, with due regard to the natural features of the site;
- (e) the provision of sufficient space in the residential area for expansion arising out of the natural increase of population and the development of other industries attracted to the town by the steel works, as well as of the growth of service industries;
- (f) the provision of sufficient space and the reservation of suitable areas for recreational activities, including sports".^{1/}

18. At its Seventh Session in 1963, the Iron and Steel Committee invited the Governing Body to make its influence felt with governments and international agencies in the field of technical and economic aid for less developed countries in order to seek to guarantee:

- "(1) that when steel works are in the process of planning in countries in course of industrialization appropriate housing and other community facilities for workers and their families and the community be part of the plan; and

^{1/} Memorandum concerning Conditions of Work and Social Problems in the Iron and Steel Industry in Countries in the course of Industrialization, Ibid., Vol.XL, No.5, 1957, p.274.

- (2) that the competent authorities of the countries concerned be responsible and take all necessary steps to ensure that sufficient financial resources will be available, either from internal or external sources, and that the financing of workers' housing and related facilities be incorporated as an integral part of the whole project".^{1/}

19. The ILO Committee of Experts on Special Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories at its Second Session drew attention to the importance of controlling housing sites within over-all town planning and housing programmes.^{2/}

Housing standards

20. The establishment of new towns presupposes the establishment of minimum standards with respect to housing. The Workers' Housing Recommendation adopted by the International Labour Conference states that "As a general principle, the competent authority should, in order to ensure structural safety and reasonable levels of decency, hygiene and comfort, establish minimum housing standards in the light of local conditions and take appropriate measures to enforce these standards".^{3/} A number of detailed suggestions concerning housing standards are also contained in the Recommendation.^{4/}

The provision of community facilities

21. The era is long since past - if it ever existed - when suitable housing could be equated merely with the provision of satisfactory shelter. Housing is so much an integral part of the neighbourhood that few workers

^{1/} Resolution concerning Housing in Steel Areas in Developing Countries, Ibid., Vol.XLVI, No.4, October 1963, p.555.

^{2/} ILO: Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories, G.B.118/3/1, March 1952, p.59.

^{3/} ILO : Official Bulletin, Vol.XLIV, No.1, 1961, p.7.

^{4/} Ibid., pp.9-10.

would not prefer minimum standard housing located in an attractive, airy locality well supplied with community facilities and services to relatively luxurious housing in an uncongenial area devoid of community facilities.

22. In the Workers' Housing Recommendation^{1/} the International Labour Conference included the following suggestion concerning the planning of community facilities in connexion with workers' housing:

"Workers' housing should, in so far as practicable and taking into account available public and private transport facilities, be within easy reach of place of employment, and in close proximity to community facilities, such as schools, shopping centres, recreation areas and facilities for all age groups, religious facilities and medical services, and should be so sited as to form attractive and well-laid-out neighbourhoods, including open spaces".

23. The First European Regional Conference in 1955 drew attention to the importance of including a number of community facilities in workers' housing programmes:

"Comprehensive town and country planning is indispensable in the development and execution of ... housing programmes, so as to ensure that proper use is made of existing land and that the housing requirements of the population in relation both to places of work and to facilities for health, transport, education, shopping, recreation, etc., and taken into account".^{2/}

24. The Iron and Steel Committee at its Sixth Session in 1957 also included a number of important community facilities in its Memorandum concerning Conditions of Work and Social Problems in the Iron and Steel Industry in Countries in the Course of Industrialization.

^{1/} Ibid., p.14.

^{2/} Resolution concerning Housing Construction, Ibid., Vol. XXXVIII, No.2, 1955, p.91.

"Where new communities are established near a steel plant and designed primarily for the workers thereof, provision should be made, among other facilities for the following:

- (a) housing for the steel workers and their families, and for the rest of the community, provided at as low a cost as possible, of a standard called for by civilized living;
- (b) the necessary public utilities;
- (c) hospitals and medical services;
- (d) schools and educational services, including adult education;
- (e) community centres, sports grounds and other facilities for cultural and recreational activities;
- (f) transport facilities between the plant and the residential area for workers living beyond reasonable walking distance;
- (g) opportunities for proper shopping facilities".^{1/}

The integration of workers' housing with the larger urban area

25. In a number of developing countries there has been a tendency for large housing estates for workers to be built in the vicinity of large industrial establishments. The creation of more or less model housing projects apart from the larger urban community has, however, had a number of undesirable results. As a consequence, several Industrial Committees of the ILO have taken cognisance of the importance of integrating workers' housing estates into the town or city of which they are a part. This is particularly important in the planning of new towns.

^{1/} Ibid., Vol. XL, No.5, 1957, pp.274-76.

26. The Petroleum Committee at its Third Session in 1951 expressed the following views:

"... any tendency permanently to segregate the workers in the petroleum industry from the rest of the community is contrary to the best interests of such communities as may develop.

"Where permanent housing has been provided for petroleum workers, which is separated from the rest of the community, the employers and the public authorities, in so far as local circumstances permit, should consult as to any steps that might be feasible and appropriate to bring about the eventual integration of the petroleum workers with the surrounding or adjacent community.

"In future cases where an employer establishes an oilfield or refinery and finds it necessary to undertake permanent housing developments for his regular workers in connexion therewith, consideration should be given, in consultation between the employer and the public authorities, to the means whereby the siting and servicing of such housing can best contribute, through co-operative efforts on the part of the public authorities, the employer and other private interests, to the development of the local community, to the end that the petroleum workers shall not be separated from the rest of the community but shall be integrated in it so that the whole community will enjoy the same privileges and responsibilities".^{1/}

27. The Coal Mines Committee at its Second Session, 1947, drew attention to the importance of merging miners' housing with the rest of the community:

^{1/} Ibid., Vol. XXXIII, No.4, 1951, pp. 144-5.

"The choice of location of the new buildings, especially at a reasonable distance from the pit-head, should serve as an opportunity for breaking down the isolation of mining communities and integrating them with the rest of the population of the region".^{1/}

28. The Iron and Steel Committee at its Sixth Session in 1957 also stressed the importance of avoiding policies which retarded the integration of steel workers with the general community in the case of workers' housing provided by employers.^{2/}

Transport facilities

29. As the size of the urban community grows, it is often not possible to construct housing within reasonable walking distance of the worker's place of employment. Private and public transport systems and the planning of the entire urban area then become of considerable significance to the worker. The Welfare Facilities Recommendation adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1956 recognizes the need for adequate transport facilities and establishes guiding principles concerning arrangements for public and private transport which reduce to a minimum the time and effort involved for the worker in going to and from his work. The relevant paragraphs are as follows:

"Where, in accordance with national or local custom, workers provide their own means of transport to and from work, suitable parking or storage facilities should be provided where necessary and practicable.

1/ Resolution concerning General Problems of Miners' Housing, ILO: The International Labour Code, 1951, Vol.II (Geneva, 1952), p.458.

2/ Memorandum concerning Conditions of Work and Social Problems in the Iron and Steel Industry in Countries in the Course of Industrialization, ILO: Official Bulletin, Vol.XL, No.5, 1957, p.275.

"Where a substantial proportion of the workers experience special difficulties in travelling to and from work owing to the inadequacy of public transport services or unsuitability of transport timetables, the undertakings in which they are employed should endeavour to secure from the organizations providing public transport in the locality concerned the necessary adjustments or improvements in their services.

"Where the workers' transport difficulties are primarily due to peak transport loads and traffic congestion at certain hours and where such difficulties cannot otherwise be overcome, the undertaking in which they are employed should, in consultation with the workers concerned, and with the public transport and traffic authorities, and, where appropriate, with other undertakings in the same locality, endeavour to adjust or stagger times of starting and finishing work in the undertaking as a whole or in some of its departments.

"Where adequate and practicable transport facilities for the workers are necessary and cannot be provided in any other way, the undertakings in which they are employed should themselves provide the transport...

"Wherever necessary, undertakings should arrange for adequate transport facilities to be available, either through the services of public transport or otherwise, to meet the needs of shift workers at times of the day and night when ordinary public transport facilities are inadequate, impracticable, or non-existent".^{1/}

^{1/} Ibid., Vol. XXXIX, No.2, 1956, p.2.

Land policy

30. One of the increasingly important factors in establishing new towns is land policy. The period since the end of the Second World War has seen a rapid expansion of many large cities which, combined with unprecedented economic prosperity and other factors, has led to rapid increases in land values, often on a speculative basis. As a result, land costs may amount to 20 or 30 per cent or even more of the total combined cost of house and land. A number of different measures have been taken to deal with the high cost of land.

31. The International Labour Conference in its Workers' Housing Recommendation recommended that:

- "(1) Public authorities should take all appropriate steps to prevent land speculation;
- (2) Public authorities should:
 - (a) have the power to acquire land at a fair price for workers' housing and related community facilities; and
 - (b) create land reserves in appropriate situations in order to facilitate advance planning of such housing and facilities.
- (3) Such land should be made available for workers' housing and related community facilities at a fair price".^{1/}

Collaboration of International Labour
Organisation with the United Nations

32. Although a number of meetings held under the auspices of the ILO have adopted recommendations on town, country and regional planning, this should not be interpreted to mean that the ILO has sought to undertake tasks in these fields which should more properly be undertaken

^{1/} Ibid., Vol. XLIV, No.1, 1961, p.8.

by the United Nations, the World Health Organization or other agencies.

On the contrary the inclusion of recommendations concerning town, country and regional planning in declarations of policy made by meetings held under the auspices of the International Labour Organisation in fact supports the broad policies which are being pursued in the field of housing by the other international organizations.

33. The programmes of the United Nations and the specialized agencies in the field of housing are co-ordinated under the Integrated Programme in the Field of Housing and Town and Country Planning which was drawn up by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination in 1949^{1/} and approved by the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations General Assembly in the same year. The Governing Body of the ILO at its 109th Session (June 1949) took note of this programme. Subsequently, a Long-Range Programme of Concerted International Action in the Field of Housing and Related Community Facilities was approved by the Economic and Social Council at its 38th Session in 1959 and endorsed by the General Assembly in December 1960. The Long-Range Programme was brought to the notice of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office in 1960.^{2/}

34. Under the integrated work programme, leadership in the field of housing has been assigned to the United Nations, while the ILO is recognized as having a major role in certain fields, including that of workers' housing. The purpose of the programme is to avoid overlapping and to ensure that, so far as possible, the entire field of housing is covered by the programmes of the United Nations and the specialized agencies. Questions which might involve duplication of activities are dealt with in the first instance under the agreements which have been entered into by the United Nations and the specialized agencies, and a general co-ordination of activities is effected under the established procedures of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination which has been set up by the Economic and Social Council.

1/ Cf. United Nations: Housing and Town and Country Planning (9 June 1949), E/1343.

2/ ILO: Long-Range Programme of Concerted International Action in the Field of Housing and Related Community Facilities (November 1960), G.B. 147/I.O./D.2/3.

35. With respect to technical assistance, the ILO extends assistance in those fields in which it has a special competence, namely, vocational training of building workers, productivity in the building industry and co-operative housing, and advising governments in formulating their policies relating to workers' housing.^{1/}

^{1/} Cf. paragraph 3(a) of Resolution concerning International Action in the Field of Workers' Housing adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1961. ILO: Official Bulletin, Vol. XLIV, No.1, 1961, p.27.