

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, and 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

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 one 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?

The Debate.

Mr. SHIRWELL 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 in 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. Shirwell, 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 agree that the House that

My contention is that the $\frac{1}{2}$ should be allowed before deducting in order to cover for splayed surfaces, cutting in, etc.

A further point under discussion is that when a lineal work of anything up to and including 12-in. girth is splayed, one-seventh addition should be allowed on the super rate per foot or yard quoted.

I shall be glad to know if there are definite rulings on these points, and if not, your own opinion on same.

A correspondent writes:—

The agreed authority on methods of measurement is the "Standard Method of Surveyors' Institution," published by the Chartered Surveyors' Institution.

I should reply to the first query as follows: That the $\frac{1}{2}$ should be added before deducting the "squares," as, if the $\frac{1}{2}$ should be added after the deduction of the "squares," the "squares" and then both "answers" will be the same—in other words, querist's contention is correct.

The further query as to lineal measurements above.

Plans for pushing ahead with housing after the war are at present under consideration by the Housing Department of Glasgow Corporation, and a report by the Research Department which has been set up under Mr. Peter Tinto, A.R.I.B.A., is to be submitted at a meeting of the Corporation Housing Committee shortly. One of the schemes to be submitted, it is understood, will be a proposal for alternative methods of house-building involving the setting up of a movable factory which would be set down in a scheme where 4,000 to 5,000 houses are to be erected. The means of large concrete sections cast on the spot, it is considered that housing stress could be at least doubled, and probably trebled.

Post-war Housing Plans, Glasgow.

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 install 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.

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 least 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 ensuring 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.

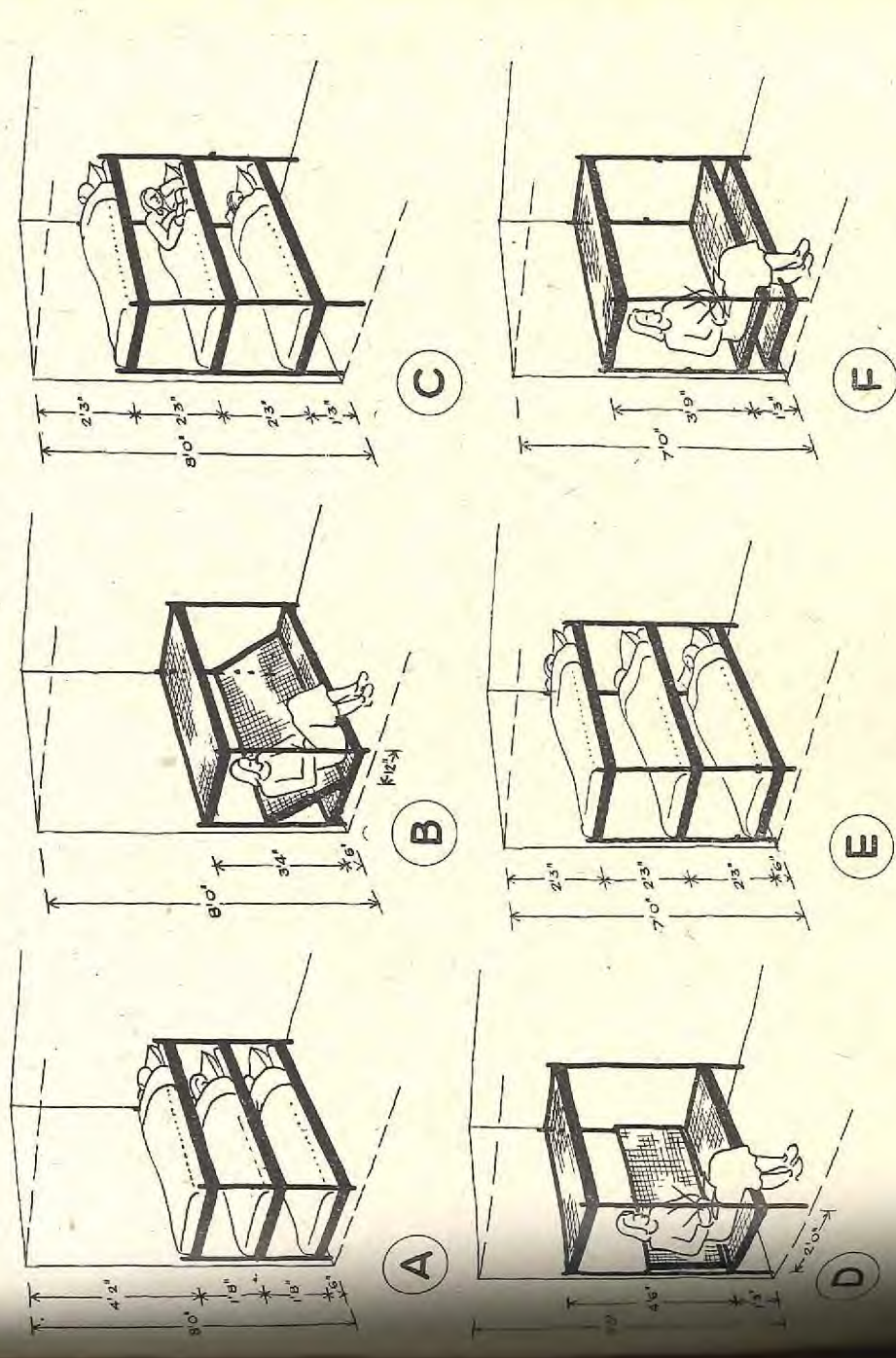
between the bunks. (See Fig. C). This is still less than the spacing normally adopted in railway sleepers, but can be considered reasonable. The Ministry's reply to such a proposal is understood to be that the bunks have been standardised for mass production to fit in the lowest shelter and that the 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.

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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 various parts of a job overall, plus an extension then deducted for glass as hereunder:

10 ft. Window sash plus
12 ft.
12/2 ft. 4 in. D/d.
2 ft.
No. 12. Squares.
Should the extension read—
120 ft. + b = 135 ft. D/d 50 ft.
120 ft. = Ans. = 78 ft. sup. and
120 ft. D/d 56 ft. = 64 ft. + b
= Ans. = 70 ft. sup. and