

HOUSE OF LORDS

Monday, 29th March, 1965

The House met at half past two of the clock, The LORD CHANCELLOR on the Woolsack.

Prayers—Read by the Lord Bishop of Manchester

FIRE RISKS IN MULTIPLE TENANCIES

2.36 p.m.

LORD AUCKLAND: My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question which stands in my name on the Order Paper.

[The Question was as follows:

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether, in view of the increase in fire incidents in multi-tenanted houses, they will ensure that every private developer of existing multiple tenancies will afford facilities for usage of solid fuel, gas or electricity for heating purposes to reduce the risk of fires through oil heaters, and that at least one electrical socket outlet is provided in addition, to eliminate overloading of the lighting point and trailing, flexible cords through the use of irons, radio and television.]

THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES (LORD MITCHISON): My Lords, Her Majesty's Government have no information at present to suggest that fire incidents in multi-occupied houses are increasing and they have no powers to require landlords to take the steps suggested by the noble Lord's Question. Under the Housing Act, 1961, local authorities may require any necessary work to be carried out in multi-occupied dwellings where the arrangements for space heating are defective, and they may also require the provision of adequate means of escape in case of fire. The safe design of oil heaters is controlled by the Oil Heaters Regulations, 1962. However, in the next

few months my right honourable friend the Minister of Housing and Local Government is undertaking a further examination of the problems arising from multi-occupation and he will arrange for the question of fire risks to be specially considered.

LORD AUCKLAND: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord for his reply. May I ask him whether he is aware that, where oil heaters have caused these fires, they have been very serious ones, with a number of fatal accidents; and whether, if the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents were to be contacted, he would consider seeing them and asking them for their views on this matter, about which they feel very strongly? It is in fact they who have asked me to submit this Question.

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, I am sure that my right honourable friend the Minister of Housing and Local Government will read what the noble Lord has just said, and in any case I will direct his attention specially to it. The facts are that, as regards fatal accidents, there were 599 fatal fires attended by fire brigades in 1963. That is the last year for which figures are available. The sources of ignition, not necessarily the cause, included 39 space heaters fired by oil, and 242 other space heaters. It is very difficult to get at the exact proportion, but I feel sure that my right honourable friend will attend to what the noble Lord has said, and, as I say, I will call his attention to it.

H.R.H. THE PRINCESS ROYAL

THE LORD PRIVY SEAL (THE EARL OF LONGFORD): My Lords, it may be for your Lordship's convenience to know that I propose to table tonight, and to move tomorrow, a Motion for a humble Address to Her Majesty conveying the sympathy of the House on the death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal. Your Lordships may like also to know that there will be a memorial service for Her Royal Highness in Westminster Abbey on Thursday at 12 noon.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

LORD SHEPHERD: My Lords, on behalf of my noble friend the Leader of the House, I beg to move the Motion which stands in his name on the Order Paper.

Moved, That, in the event of the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill being received from the Commons this day, Standing Order No. 41 (*No two stages of a Bill to be taken on one day*) be dispensed with for the purpose of enabling the Bill to be taken through all its stages this day.—(*Lord Shepherd.*)

On Question, Motion agreed to.

LEE CONSERVANCY CATCHMENT BOARD (NEW FUNCTIONS OF RIVER AUTHORITIES) ORDER 1965

2.40 p.m.

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, I beg to move that this Order be approved. Noble Lords on all sides of the House will remember long debates on the Water Resources Act, 1963. The noble Lord, Lord Hastings, in particular, will need no reminding of the many hours of patient work that he devoted to the subject. The Order now before the House is merely the last stage in the application of that Act.

The Act itself established for England and Wales a new and comprehensive system for the conservation of water resources. It did this by providing for river authorities who will add water conservation functions to the functions which they inherit from river boards. They are fisheries, land drainage and the prevention of pollution. The river authorities were set up by Order on October 15 last, and take on their full functions on April 1. Speaking in the last three days of the life of the river boards, I may perhaps be forgiven for departing from the main line of my speech just to say how much the Government appreciate the work that river boards have done since they came into being about fifteen years ago.

The new system has two aspects. Positively, it charges the river authorities with the duty of surveying and conserving the resources of their own areas, and, where necessary, augmenting them from other

areas under the guidance of the Water Resources Board. It safeguards investment in water conservation, and makes sure that a national policy is carried through, by means of a system of licensing the abstraction or impounding of water, so that the use of water is fully controlled. I do not need to persuade noble Lords of the vital importance of the success of these arrangements, for the health of the economy as much as for the health of the individual.

As I have said, river authorities will be based upon river boards, taking over their areas and receiving direct transfer of their functions. There is, however, a special feature. In the Thames and Lee Catchments there have been no river boards as such. Most of the duties carried out by river boards elsewhere have here been carried out instead by the Conservators of the River Thames and by the Lee Conservancy Catchment Board—bodies whose constitutions as well as their powers and duties differ from those of the river boards. It was therefore impossible for the Act simply to confer the new water resources functions on the Conservators and the Catchment Board without more ado, and what it did instead was to give the Minister power to give them to the two bodies by Order, and to amend their constitutions appropriately. This was done for the Thames by Order last July; the present Order does the same for the Lee. It gives the Catchment Board all the new functions that river authorities will be exercising in the rest of the country; and it re-makes the Board's constitution on lines as similar as possible to the constitutions of river authorities. It is an Order full of detail, but these are its two, quite simple, purposes.

As with river authorities, a bare majority of the Board's members—in this case thirteen in number—will be appointed by local authorities. Twelve of these are from authorities on which the Catchment Board precepts the county councils, and the London borough and county borough councils, and the other is to be appointed by the Greater London Council, on whom the Board do not precept, but who have a very great interest indeed in regional development in the Lee Valley.

[Lord Mitchison.]

The remaining twelve members are being appointed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government for their knowledge of the public water supply and the use of water in industry; by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as similarly qualified in respect of agriculture, land drainage and fisheries; and by the Minister of Transport—the navigation interest on the Lee is important. Here again the pattern is the same as for the river authorities, except that three of the four public water supply members are to be appointed by the Minister from among nominees of the Metropolitan Water Board, which has a predominant interest in water supply in the Lee Valley. The balance of interests and the proposals for representation have won general—though not quite unanimous—assent.

I do not believe I need trouble noble Lords with a detailed exposition of the provisions of the order but I should like to end by referring again to the importance of water conservation and proper management of our resources. The Lee Catchment with its flourishing industry, horticulture and population is an area of heavy and rising demand, and its problems are by no means the least in the country. I am sure all noble Lords will want to join me in wishing the Catchment Board well. Its new task is very large, its opportunities correspondingly great. I beg to move.

Moved, That the Lee Conservancy Catchment Board (New Functions of River Authorities) Order 1965, be approved.—(*Lord Mitchison.*)

LORD HASTINGS: My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord for his explanation, and I am sure that we all join in wishing the new Lee Conservancy Catchment Board the best of luck in the future. As the noble Lord said, this special Order was necessary because there had been no river boards for the area before but, in general, the new functions of the Conservancy Catchment Board set up by this Order follow the pattern of the rest of the river authorities over all the country. I should at the same time like to pay a tribute to the work of the river boards. We praised their work when we were discussing this Bill, but it is just as well to emphasise that aspect of the matter.

This, I think, will be the last Order in connection with the Water Resources Act, 1963. The noble Lord was kind enough to refer to the long hours and patient work that I put in on that Act. The same, of course, is true of a great many other noble Lords in this House. I shall always remember this Act as one of the great co-operative efforts of this House which produced a most necessary and, I think, entirely excellent Act about which there could be no possible disagreement. I thank the noble Lord for what he has said, and I do not think that the matter calls for any further comments on my part.

On Question, Motion agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (No. 2) BILL

Brought from the Commons, endorsed with the Certificate of the Speaker that the Bill is a Money Bill, within the meaning of the Parliament Act, 1911; and read 1^a.

Then, Standing Order No. 41 having been dispensed with (pursuant to Resolution), Bill read 2^a; Committee negatived; Bill read 3^a, and passed, and returned to the Commons.

MILNER HOLLAND REPORT ON LONDON HOUSING

2.48 p.m.

LORD SILKIN rose to call attention to the Report of the Committee on Housing in Greater London (Cmd. 2605); and to move for Papers. The noble Lord said: My Lords, I should like to begin by expressing my thanks, and I am sure the thanks of the whole House, to Sir Milner Holland and his Committee for the immense task which they have recently completed in producing this monumental Report. It is monumental especially for those who have to read it, as I imagine every noble Lord in this House has done. I think that we sometimes underestimate the amount of time and effort involved on the part of the Chairmen and Committees in undertaking a task of this kind, particularly when they have been acting under instructions to report as quickly as possible. I do not know, but I imagine that many members of this Committee must have laid aside their normal avocations and devoted a

great part of their time to the production of this Report. I think that we ought seriously to be grateful to them for having done so.

The Report deals with housing conditions in Greater London, and there are an immense number of findings of fact, most of which, I believe, are non-controversial, though a few may be open to challenge: for instance, the statement in Chapter 8 that there is plenty of good accommodation for rent in London at rentals of £400 to £500 per annum and above. I think I should agree to the "above", but I should certainly not agree, from my own experience, that there is plenty of accommodation, certainly not suitable accommodation, at those rents. The Report is long, but easy to read; but no doubt owing to the lack of an index I found it very difficult to find my way around it. When I had a particular fact I found it most elusive afterwards, in the absence of an index, to find it again. I hope it is not too late even now—the Committee may be *functus officio*—for somebody to produce an index to this Report, so as to make it easier for people to get around it.

The Report has received plenty of publicity. The Press has given fairly full reports of it. There have been a number of wireless statements, and even a special announcement this morning that there was to be a debate in this House on the Milner Holland Report. They forgot to mention that it was being moved, but they mentioned the speakers. There have been leading articles in the daily and weekly periodicals. There has been a debate in another place, and now, last but not least, a debate here. Almost everything that could possibly have been said has been said already. Nevertheless, I do not despair of the twenty or so speakers who are taking part in this debate to-day finding something fresh and original to say, based on their own knowledge and experience.

Most of the facts that are produced in this Report were known to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. If anyone was taken by surprise, it was certainly not the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Those facts were perfectly well known to them. Indeed, together with the local authorities they supplied a great part of the evidence upon which the Report is based

—evidence of shortages, evidence of housing conditions and so on. I admit that a good deal of further evidence was given by a number of Members of Parliament of both Parties—I leave out the third Party because they did not give any evidence, but the two main Parties did—and by a number of organisations and private persons, and the Committee expressed due gratitude to all of them for the trouble they took.

As I have said, I doubt whether the Report adds anything to the knowledge of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government on the subject, but I am far from saying that therefore the Report serves no useful purpose. It does, because although the Ministry and the local authorities may have been aware of those facts, I am sure that the general public was not aware of them, and it must have come as a great shock to the members of the public to find that housing conditions in Greater London are as bad as is stated in this Report.

It is quite impossible to do justice to my Motion in a short speech, or even an intolerably long one, and I hope that what I shall say will not be intolerably long. I can therefore draw attention to only the most important findings, and even then in a perhaps over-simplified form. I hope that other speakers will fill in the gaps. I will try to be as uncontroversial as I can, in response to the Opposition plea in another place, and I will deal with the question of housing as objectively as I can. But before I come to the Report, there are three things I should like to say, and I very badly want to get them off my chest. First, as to the housing shortage, which I will say more about later on, the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, will remember that, over and over again in this House and in another place, we have stressed the fact that there is a tremendous shortage of housing, particularly in London. In many of the debates we actually gave figures and calculations and set out what we thought required to be done. I am sorry to say that we had very little support or encouragement.

The second thing I want to say is on the question of rent control. Noble Lords opposite will remember the strong opposition that we put up, both in this House and in the other place, to the

[Lord Silkin.] 1957 Act. We pointed out exactly what would happen: that many families would be rendered homeless and that a tremendous amount of suffering would be caused by abnormal increases in rent as a result of decontrol at a time when there was a shortage of housing. All this has been proved by the Report to be abundantly true, and although, admittedly, the Report does not claim that decontrol is the only cause of housing shortage or difficulty, it nevertheless makes it clear that it plays a great part.

The third thing I want to say is in connection with what is now being called "harassment"—that is, intimidation, acts by landlords calculated to make life intolerable for tenants in order to induce them to give up possession. The House will remember that here we begged the Government, we pleaded with them, to put something in the Housing Act, 1964, which would deal with this problem. It would have been quite simple from a technical point of view; it needed only a short Amendment, which we prepared. We put this Amendment down on Second Reading, we put it down on the Committee stage, we put it down on the Report stage and we had it on the Third Reading. But in each case the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, with his habitual skill—I admit he was skilful—used, I think it was, the Milner Holland Report, which was then being considered, as a reason for not doing anything in the 1964 Bill.

The same thing happened in another place; Amendments were put down and they were strongly resisted. But the facts were known. Admittedly it was not known that a particular landlord put a snake inside a bath to frighten the tenant away; the particular incidents were not known, but the general facts were perfectly well known and brought out, and there was no earthly reason why an Amendment should not have been accepted in the 1964 Bill to deal with this particular problem. Those are the things that I felt it right to mention in, I hope, a not too controversial manner. But on all three of them we have been proved to be justified.

To come to the Report itself, it is based on information about Greater London. The most serious cause of hardship in Greater London is stated to be insecurity

of tenure. The Committee stress that over and over again. Facts are given in Chapter 8, which deals with insecurity, and I would suggest that this ought to be compulsory reading for every legislator in either House. Unless one has read and digested Chapter 8 of this Report, one really cannot be said to understand the facts about housing in Greater London or even outside.

I should like to refer to just one or two of the facts that are referred to in Chapter 8 of the Report. One of the ways in which hardship reflects itself, and particularly insecurity, is in the number of removals. Most people find that one or two removals of home in the course of their lifetime are quite enough. But in the case of the class of tenant that we are talking about—namely, the tenant with an uncontrolled rent—the Committee have made an investigation into the position in 40 months, between July, 1960, and December, 1963, and the number of moves in unfurnished, uncontrolled lettings represented 16 per cent per annum; therefore, in the category of families living in uncontrolled tenancies, one family in every six had to move. This figure, as the Committee say, is high enough to indicate the discomfort and unsettled conditions. The Committee say that most of the removals are involuntary or forced moves. Of the moves, 25 per cent. in unfurnished, uncontrolled lettings and 21 per cent. in those relating to furnished lettings were involuntary—that is, forced upon the tenant by the landlord.

Leaving out, as the Committee say, pure vindictiveness or incompatibility, the reasons given are mostly the wish of the owner to sell with vacant possession and to realise the scarcity value of his property. Of course, some of the purchases were forced upon the tenants who themselves bought the houses at current market scarcity prices. Sometimes the owner desired to occupy the house himself, and possibly to put in members of his own family. Again, some landlords sought to obtain possession in order to convert and improve their property which, when it was carried out, commanded a much higher rent; or, in extreme cases, to demolish the premises altogether and, where they were able to get permission, to carry out redevelopment for more

profitable commercial uses. The Committee were told that in all too many cases, also, notice to quit was given as soon as it became known that the tenant's wife was pregnant. Another reason given was simply the inability of the tenant to meet the demand for higher rent. He simply could not pay.

There are many heartrending cases quoted in the Report, the effect of all of which is that this insecurity brought about inability to get other accommodation, homelessness, the break-up of families, separation of husbands, wives and children, perhaps temporarily but perhaps, as the Report says, for a considerable period. One of the witnesses said that a person looking for shelter and accommodation might as well have smallpox as have children. Apart from the number of tenants actually receiving notice to quit, this insecurity of tenure, to which the Committee attach so great importance, includes the fear of receiving a notice to quit at any time. This point is illustrated in one particularly striking case where a family were living in part of a house and the w.c. went wrong; it was not working. It was the only w.c. in the house available to them. If the landlord was not willing to carry out the work of having it repaired, the obvious course was to go to the local authority. But the tenants refrained from doing so for fear that that would bring about a notice to quit when they had nowhere to go. The result, according to the Report, was that for many months this family used public lavatories.

That is only one small example of the kind of fact that is brought out as showing the results of insecurity of tenure. Therefore, I am glad that the Government have been so prompt in introducing a Bill which, I hope, will have the effect of relieving the minds of a great many unhappy families to-day and giving them security of tenure so long as they pay a reasonable rent. I will not comment on this Bill. We shall probably have a good deal to say about it in due course when it comes before the House. It is going to another place next Monday.

I think it right to say this. The Committee, in dealing with this question of insecurity, make no attempt to condemn landlords as a class. Nor do I. They are no better and no worse than members of any other profession or business; there

are good and bad among them. But, unfortunately, they are in a commanding position where they can influence the lives and happiness of large numbers of their fellow citizens in an unprecedented way, where they have an inducement to do so, and where, in many cases, the people over whom they have this influence are homeless. Although I do not suggest that every landlord takes advantage of his position, it is a fact that a great many do.

All this would not have been as difficult if there had been an adequate supply of private rented accommodation in Greater London; but the fact is that the supply is inadequate. It has diminished, and is still diminishing. The Report says that there is an acute shortage of rented housing in London. The number of households whose housing conditions cause hardship is substantial, severe and increasing. The people who are most affected, as one would expect, are those with low incomes who have neither a controlled dwelling nor a council tenancy—families with children, newcomers to London, and a smaller but growing number of elderly people; and I should add newly wedded young people, of whom there is an increasing number, as I shall mention later on.

Here are some general figures which give the measure in overall terms of the shortage. These figures, may I tell the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, were prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. I quote from the figures which they gave as evidence. There were 2,549,000 dwellings in Greater London in 1964 and 2,780,000 potential households. So there was a shortage in 1964 of 231,000 dwellings. I want to emphasise that the Ministry were aware of this figure. The figure had grown over the previous six months by about 15,000, and since April, 1961, the numbers have grown by 43,000. The noble Lord and his friends were in control all that time. They knew that this shortage was growing and growing.

The Committee point out that the rate of loss may be as high as 4 per cent. per annum—very substantial. The major components in the loss were previously rented dwellings which had become wholly owner-occupied as a result of decontrol, or had been sold to sitting tenants mostly as a result of decontrol, or demolished, or, in a few cases, converted

[Lord Silkin.]
to commercial use and reconstructed and improved but nevertheless resulting in a loss of accommodation. Incidentally, this phenomenon is not confined to Greater London. Although, as I have said, the Report deals with Greater London, a good many of the findings could be applied to other parts of the country, particularly to the conurbations in the Midlands, the North-East, and so on. The corresponding loss of rented accommodation in England and Wales, for instance, is estimated at over 750,000 dwellings between the Census of 1961 and the end of 1964. So it is not merely a London problem.

In the light of these figures, I submit that to talk of an overall number of dwellings built in any particular year—as noble Lords opposite used to do when boasting of their great achievements in building 300,000 dwellings in any year—is quite irrelevant unless one also states the kinds of dwellings, where they were built, whether they were to let or for sale, and at what figure. The vast majority of such dwellings, other than local authority houses, were mostly to rehouse people displaced from slum dwellings and were houses for sale or expensive flats. The noble Lord will remember that the last time we had a debate on housing I referred to expensive flats which anyone could rent in places like Bournemouth, Brighton and Eastbourne, at £1,000 a year—flats which had been vacant for a number of years but which, nevertheless, counted in the 300,000 dwellings built in a particular year. If the noble Lord wants to find some flats in London at £2,000 a year, there are plenty available. And they all count against the number of dwellings which noble Lords opposite have boasted they have built in a particular year.

A good many of these dwellings which have been erected in recent years have been houses for sale. They have reflected the higher standard of living of large numbers of families by providing them with better accommodation, larger accommodation, and more convenient accommodation. But the poorer section of the community has been left even worse off. We have been slowly moving towards establishing two communities: the community who are benefiting from the affluent society and who are better housed and better off in every way, and

the other community, the poor section, who are living on terms of insecurity and poverty and who are having to spend a disproportionate amount of their income in paying rent for wholly inadequate accommodation.

There is one other aspect of the Report on which I should like to say a word—the physical conditions in which so many families are living and the exorbitant rents which they are being charged. Here are a few of the facts which the Committee brought out. One family in five lives in multi-occupied dwellings, usually originally intended or built for one family alone. Many have no bath, or where they have one they have to share it with a number of families; considerably more have no separate w.c. Of those sharing a house, about a quarter are without the exclusive use of stoves, sinks, baths, and so on. Decoration and structural condition is usually bad. The rents, where premises are decontrolled, are high. I should like to read from the evidence given by a medical officer of health to the Committee. He said:

“ . . . The herding together of people, often incompatible, the inconveniences, the lack of space especially for such things as play or pram storage, the inadequate and inconvenient washing, sanitary and food handling facilities, stairs, noise, fetching and carrying distances, and the dirt, dilapidation and depressing appearance consequent upon the neglect of parts used in common, all have their effects.”

He added:

“ To these much be added the increased liability to home accidents, infections, contagion, risk of fire and mental stress.”

That was said by the medical officer of health for the Royal Borough of Kensington in reference to that borough, which is by no means the worst of the London boroughs. But he describes these conditions as typical of those under which large numbers of families in Kensington are living. Therefore, in considering the overall shortage of accommodation in Greater London, we must have in mind this further fact which I have stated; that over a million families are sharing a house, and the great majority of them are short of the necessary facilities for decent living and are overcrowded and paying abnormally high rents. This, my Lords, is happening in what the Committee describe as the wealthiest city in Europe, where the standard of living is supposed to be constantly rising.

I have described, I hope fairly, the findings of the Committee as to the conditions in which many people in London and Greater London are living. What flows from these findings? The Committee make no specific recommendations, although in a number of their conclusions the recommendations are fairly clear. They emphasise, first, the need for security of tenure, and, secondly, the need to deal with what I described as "harassment", or intimidation and other acts of nuisance or annoyance to tenants by landlords and their agents. Thirdly, there is the question of what steps the Government could take to deal with the increasing number of people coming into London, which of course adds to the problem of housing here. Surprisingly, it is not a major factor. The Committee do not treat it as a major factor, and they certainly do not treat the immigration into London of coloured people as a major factor. To the extent that it does arise, the problem flows from the coming of people from areas of unemployment in this country, as well, of course, as coloured people.

I think the Government are doing something to control the amount of unemployment. Regulations about the number of offices that are being built, and the requirements to be met in order to obtain a development certificate to put up a factory, have been changed. I think that by reducing the capacity for increased employment in Greater London, the Government can do a good deal to prevent the problem from becoming worse as a result of immigration. It might be as well if the regions were warned that the facilities for employment were being restricted, so as to discourage people coming to London on the off-chance.

The most important contribution that can be made, however, is by dealing with improvement in housing conditions in the category of multi-occupied dwellings. The Housing Act, 1964, made a substantial contribution. It increased the powers of the local authorities to deal with improvements; it increased the grants to landlords, and it provided sanctions against landlords who were unwilling to carry out repairs. I said at the time that it was a good Bill, but that I doubted whether it would work. I still doubt it. One of the difficulties—and it is not the fault of noble Lords opposite—is that in many cases where

it is desired to make radical alterations to a building, in order to make it really habitable, it is necessary to get the tenants out, at any rate for the time being; and even local authorities are unwilling to make an order for carrying out repairs and improvements which will involve tenants' leaving their homes, and in that way rendering them homeless.

One of the things which the Government must do is to give consideration to this specific point. We shall never get much further with the improvement of housing conditions until there is a pool of accommodation available to which families can be sent temporarily while work is being carried out. But we have to remember that, when all is said and done, this is bound to result in reduced accommodation. It will not increase the accommodation, but it will make life tolerable. I do not know whether or not the financial inducements to landlords under the 1964 Act are good enough. I should be very willing that they should be looked at again. But I think they would have to be looked at in conjunction with the possibility of providing alternative accommodation while the work of improvement was going on, and this would be necessary in a great many cases.

Now I come to the real crux of the matter; that is, how to increase the overall accommodation, the overall number, of rented dwellings. There are three agencies for this. There are the local authorities; there are the housing associations, and there are the private landlords. Can the local authorities do more? I think they can. We have got to improve our methods of construction. The local authorities, particularly the new London boroughs, must be much more willing to pool their resources together and to form consortia for carrying out building on a large scale. They have got to be very willing to apply new methods and to erect factory-built houses. They will naturally need more land, and I believe the Government have made available a considerable amount of land in various parts of London—Woolwich, Croydon Aerodrome, Hendon, as well as a certain amount of railway land. At any rate, for some time to come there will be a considerable amount of land available.

[Lord Silkin.]

I think that we must look again at the question of subsidy. The subsidies to various local authorities, have grown out of all recognition. If you look at the Exchequer subsidy to different boroughs, it is very difficult to appreciate what distinguishes one borough from another, except, to a certain extent, the high cost of land. For instance, Chelsea gets £75 a year per dwelling, whereas Bermondsey gets £22 and Woolwich £14. Curiously enough, Woolwich, Bermondsey, Bethnal Green and Poplar receive the lowest amount of subsidy, and Chelsea, Paddington, Holborn and Kensington the greatest amount. I think there is a case for looking once more into the whole question of subsidy. There may have been good historic reasons for the present state of affairs, and I am not complaining; but if we are going to start with a big drive to-day, I think that this whole question ought to be looked at again. We must remember that the local authority itself provides roughly an equal amount, so that in the case of Chelsea or Paddington the total subsidy per dwelling is something like £130 a year. My Lords, these are things that have to be done before we can make a drive.

Now I want to say a word about housing associations. The Housing Act, 1964, purports to help them, and housing associations clearly have a great part to play. Their function is to provide housing for that section of the community which is not eligible for local authority housing; for people who cannot get on to a housing list, but are able to pay a higher rent than is normally charged by a local authority. Such people include families who cannot afford to buy a house or, for one reason or another, are not able to do so; and they constitute a large section of the community. I happen to be familiar with a housing association in South Wales, which is putting up something like 400 dwellings. There is an enormous waiting list for these houses, at rents of between £4 10s. 0d. and £5 a week. I do not say that that kind of rent will always be possible in other places—there, land costs are somewhat lower than usual—but there is an enormous demand by families who can pay this kind of rent.

The other day I spoke to a woman who was homeless. I asked her what rent she was prepared to pay, and she replied, “£7 a week”. This was a person who had been rendered homeless as a result of being turned out by a landlord. The local authority could not house her, but she is the type of person who could be housed by a housing association; and I think we ought to do everything we possibly can to encourage them.

My Lords, I want to point out one difficulty that has arisen in connection with the administration of the 1964 Act. The noble Lord, Lord Hastings, will remember that it was provided in the Act that the building societies would provide two-thirds of the cost of housing and the Exchequer one-third; and he may remember that I challenged him from time to time as to whether he was quite sure that the building societies would put up the money, and what would happen if they did not. He will be interested to know that, in the main, they are not putting up the money. A few are, but the majority are not. I can say this from personal experience, having, on behalf of clients, applied for advances from a number of building societies. I have been told that they are not in a position to make the advance. I do not say that they are justified, I do not say that they are not—I do not know. But the fact is that the noble Lords opposite made no fixed, fast provisions for securing money. Fortunately, we were able to get a provision in the Act which provides that, where there is a failure on the part of the building societies, the Exchequer will provide the money.

There is one other point about housing associations. At the moment, they have no advantages whatever as regards tax relief. They make no profits, the profits they would normally make going towards repaying capital and interest on loans. The amount involved is quite as much as the normal profit; but they make no more, and they get no assistance whatever from the Exchequer. It seems to me that it would pay the Government to give them some assistance, either by way of tax relief on capital repayments or in some other way, in order to facilitate their work and to help them to obtain sites, either through the local

authorities or otherwise. I hope that the Government will do something about these housing associations.

The other agency for providing houses is, of course, private enterprise, and the question arises: what contribution can they make towards providing rented accommodation at rents which people are able to pay? The Report makes it quite clear that they are not in a position to do so in London. It is not the fault of the private landlords; but the fact remains that, unless they get financial assistance from the Government, they cannot provide housing at reasonable rents, and the question arises whether they should be given financial assistance. On this point there may be differences of opinion. My own view is that I have no particular objection to helping the private landlord to do the job if he will do it, but I very much doubt whether he will.

Just picture the position. Take a private landlord who is given Exchequer or local authority assistance. Naturally, whoever provides the assistance will want to be quite certain that the dwellings go to the people for whom they are intended. In other words, the local authority (if the local authority provide the assistance) will want to control the rents, and will want to make quite sure that those who get the benefit of the lettings are the people who need them. The local authority will want to control the condition of the dwellings; they will want to control the question of evictions and notices to quit; and, naturally, they will want to control in every other way. The result would be that the private landlord would become, in effect, the agent of the local authority. I doubt whether private landlords, by and large, will be willing to accept assistance under those conditions. Then, of course, they would want a return. They would expect a return to which the normal local authority, I am afraid, would be unwilling to agree. Taking all these factors together, while I myself (and I speak only for myself) would be prepared to entertain the idea of assisting private landlords on conditions, I doubt whether we should be able to agree upon the conditions under which they could be assisted, and, if we did, I doubt whether the private landlords themselves would be willing to accept them.

My Lords, I have been speaking for a long time, and I promise that I am coming towards the end. I think everything I have said points to the need for building on a large scale. We shall have to go outside the enlarged London Government boundaries. We cannot rigidly lay down that each London borough shall build within its own area. Many of them do not have the land to do it: they have got to go outside. We may even have to go outside the Greater London area itself. We may even have to build one or more New Towns—I hope we do. Therefore, I feel that the overall responsibility for dealing with the shortage of houses should be with the Greater London Council, and not with the individual local authorities. I think it is quite unthinkable that this enormous task should be handled by 31 different local authorities. This is one of the few recommendations of the Committee.

From the point of view of human happiness and dignity, I believe that this is the greatest task which this Government, or any future Government, will have to face. I think that we shall be judged by the contribution we make towards a solution of this terrible problem. Until every family in the country has a decent home, this task must not be abandoned or relaxed. I wish the Government every success, and in undertaking this task they have all my blessings. I beg to move for Papers.

3.40 p.m.

LORD HASTINGS: My Lords, we are all very much indebted to the noble Lord who has moved this Motion. I cannot but feel that it was a particularly felicitous thought on the part of the Government to persuade the noble Lord to introduce our debate. In so doing, they ensured a high standard, I hope, throughout the whole debate; for the noble Lord not only has a very wide knowledge of the subject of housing, and particularly in London, but, of course, always contrives to approach the subject with an essential fair-mindedness even though his speech may be interlarded with many criticisms of the other side. Nevertheless, his criticisms are always expressed in such a pleasant and unprovocative manner that one cannot take exception to them.

Certainly to-day the noble Lord has taken that constructive approach towards

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the Report of the Milner Holland Committee which it demands and so thoroughly deserves. I should like to associate myself with the thanks to that Committee and my congratulations for really quite remarkable work in every sense of that word, in every aspect of the matter, not least in achieving this Report in eighteen months. I think that was nothing short of a miracle, and they did so with such a high degree of accuracy, although even the Committee themselves do not claim 100 per cent. accuracy.

It is perhaps early to estimate the precise importance of this Report. It is limited to London, it is true, but, as we all know very well, the problems of housing and employment in London have such an overwhelming effect on the South-East, and that, in turn, on the rest of the country, that I think we can truly describe this Report as being of national significance. If that is so, it may in years to come be compared in importance with the Beveridge Report. Your Lordships will remember that that Report was commissioned by a Coalition Government under a Conservative Prime Minister, it was written by an eminent Liberal; and it was put into effect by a Labour Government. It could have been described as almost a non-Party measure. At any rate, it was a co-operative effort.

This Report was commissioned by a Conservative Government—notably by my right honourable friend Sir Keith Joseph, who announced his intention in a White Paper as far back as February, 1963. He did this with a full appreciation of the need to review the housing policy in London and with the desire to have the real facts upon which to base such a policy. The noble Lord, Lord Silkin, has referred to the facts which were known by the Ministry of Housing. I think he assumed that we who were working there knew rather more than one might expect to, but certainly we knew the trend of this problem and we were most desirous to have the facts, not only so that the rest of the country could know what the true position was, but so that we could act in the future knowing precisely what we had to tackle. A Labour Government now have the opportunity to bring in legislation based on this Report.

To that extent, and only to that extent, can we describe the Report and our debate as being of a non-political character. Housing is a matter which touches everybody at one of the most sensitive points of his existence. It is inevitable that there must be political discussion on this, and that there will be variations of political policy. Therefore, I make no plea to take the subject out of Party politics. What I do hope, however, in common with the Milner Holland Committee, is that we can at least eschew political prejudice, which is rather a different thing from political policy. Especially let us try to avoid blind political prejudice. I can congratulate the noble Lord on having done so very successfully.

I believe that from this Report one thing is absolutely clear, even on a cursory reading, and still more so on a second reading. That is, on the one hand, that rigid rent control, to which the Labour Party hitherto has been indissolubly wedded, has been disastrous to the provision of sufficient private housing for renting and also of an adequate standard of such private housing for renting that already exists; and, on the other hand, that indiscriminate decontrol of rents has failed to solve the problem, and cannot be expected to do so, in London. To that extent both our main Parties are “in the dog house”. If noble Lords wish to sling mud in this direction, I can assure them that there is ample ammunition in this Report to justify our slinging it straight back in their faces; but I hope this will not be necessary. I believe the traditions and reputation of your Lordships’ House ensure that we can approach this matter in a reasonably objective manner and produce a very constructive debate out of it.

Like the noble Lord who spoke first, I should like to get one matter in particular out of the way. It relates to what is perhaps his major criticism, the question of “harassment” as he called it, “abuses” as the Milner Holland Report calls it, and “Rachmanism” as we used to call it. We know that abuses have taken place from 1954 onwards, in the case of Rachmanism, and from even before that in the case of other people. The Report says this of it:

“Whatever the true reasons may be it seems clear that the root causes of these ugly mani-

festations cannot be linked with either control or decontrol."

I think that disposes of one of the arguments, from whichever side of the House it is made.

The noble Lord, Lord Silkin, referred to our lengthy debates on the Housing Bill in 1964. I never said that we had dealt with all abuses. As he pointed out, I was going to rely on the findings of the Milner Holland Committee in taking action to close the final loopholes in putting an end to abuses. But I should like to remind noble Lords that the Report has found that 83 per cent. of these abuses seem to occur in multi-occupied accommodation. That, of course, is precisely the accommodation dealt with—and I hope effectively—in Part IV of the Housing Act, 1964, which allows local authorities to make immediate entry without notice and to take over property and control it for five years.

In view of what the Report had to say about the law and penalties, it is interesting to find what the position is. There are penalties laid down in Part IV, as follows. For the failure to execute works (that is, under Part II of the 1961 Act, which is linked with the 1964 Act) there is a penalty of £100, and for a second offence £100 plus three months in prison. It is unlawful to enforce repossession after control order has been made, the penalty being £100 or six months. Finally, anybody preventing the carrying out of work is fined £20 per day. Now we find under the new Rent Bill, taking a hint from this Report, a provision similar to that in New York, and it is intended that any act of intimidation shall be punished by a fine of £100, or £500 the second time, and possibly imprisonment of six months. We had long arguments about this. I do not think I need go over the old ground again. We are perfectly ready to accept this provision in the light of the Milner Holland Report, which covers not merely multi-occupied accommodation but all accommodation, and that is really the point I made last year.

But this touches only the fringe of the problem. Vitally important though it is to several thousands of people, nevertheless, in the worst areas the incidence of abuse was found to be only between 1 and 2 per cent. of the total amount of privately rented property and in other

boroughs, to be under 0.5 per cent. But, as the Committee themselves say, their terms of reference were much wider and were designed deliberately by Sir Keith Joseph to cover all the rented houses in London, so that we might have a sound, revised policy for the whole area.

Perhaps it will do no harm to refer briefly to the early chapters of London housing since the war, as a background to the problem. The Labour Government immediately after the war built houses to replace those destroyed, which numbered 116,000. But there were about 1½ million houses needing war damage repair, some of them badly. Moreover, there had been very little building during the war, and during those six years very little repair or maintenance work was carried out. As a result, very little slum clearance was carried out up to 1953. When the Conservative Government had pushed up the rate of house-building from 200,000 to 300,000 a year, we were faced with two problems. First, land was becoming more difficult to find, and secondly, because the slums had been neglected, and standards of repair had been neglected, the number of slum properties was increasing and their condition was getting worse. I do not think that anybody could claim that it was wrong to turn to a policy of slum clearance from that time onwards.

In parenthesis, I would refer to what the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, said about the shortage. In the White Paper, we said that there was a shortage of accommodation for households of 350,000 in 1951 and 150,000 now. These figures have been revised as a result of the 1961 Census and, from what I can gather from the Report, the revised figures are that in 1951 the shortage in London seemed to have been 480,000 and it is now 240,000. Nevertheless, this still represents an improvement of over 200,000 houses.

Against such a background, I do not think it is reasonable to suggest that we could have wiped off the backlog entirely, whatever we had been able to do or whatever policy we had pursued. The result of all this development after the war and of the various political approaches to the question of housing was that, during the period 1946 to 1954, families on the waiting lists were being rehoused, while slum dwellers were remaining where they were; and in the period 1954 to 1965, the

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majority of people rehoused came from the slums, while the waiting lists did not diminish—indeed, so far as I know, they increased.

There are reasons for this besides those I have already given. There has been an unforeseen increase in the population of this country and an equally unforeseen increase in the number of households because of people marrying younger. In a time of increasing prosperity during the last ten years, London has acted as a magnet, attracting the young, both single and just married. There has been a similar pattern in all the major cities in Europe and America. This has meant that the people seeking accommodation were the single and the young marrieds; moreover, the elderly families, who were living longer, holding on longer, were requiring rehousing in their own neighbourhoods. Most of these were in the low income groups, but they were not the people who were being rehoused by the local authorities, who were building mainly two and three-bedroom flats and houses.

What of the future? What can be done, now that we know that the worst congestion is in the County of London generally and in Inner London in particular? We have to take into account not only the amount of accommodation required, but also the types of accommodation, together with the inevitable loss of land for new roads, road widening, schools and the necessary open spaces to give what we now call the necessary "quality" of living. Naturally some people are going to be displaced. It seems to me that there should be a careful revision of the scale of density building in Inner London. Photographs in the Report show what a density of 200 persons per acre looks like in the old slum conditions and in the new blocks of flats. But there are many areas in Inner London where the density of redevelopment has been as low as 70 persons per acre. I believe it should be possible to rehouse a much larger number of people in London than at the moment, with the aim of rehousing possibly all of them.

This is a matter for the local authorities and it is one that brings me to the problem of the waiting lists. Most local authorities act on more or less the same principle. The most important variation

is in the residential qualifications. The Minister has no control over this. These residential qualifications cause as many rows in local politics as people trying to jump a bus queue or a cinema queue. The qualifications for obtaining a house should be based, not only on family and economic needs, but also on location and type of accommodation. In addition, we need to achieve a degree of uniformity in these residential qualifications. Possibly the Minister may have to take some powers in this direction, without necessarily interfering too much with the power of the local authorities.

This leads me straight to the overall problem, not only of the accommodation of the population but also of its distribution, and therefore, in so far as London is concerned, to the Greater London Council and its powers, which were mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Silkin. The Greater London Council was created by the London Government Act, fortunately, perhaps, in time for this major problem facing the people of London. The Council has the major responsibility for overspill, though there are cases where London boroughs can apply to the Minister for their own overspill scheme. I believe that that will rarely happen. Then, inside London, those powers are limited to the extent that they must build for the overspill of one borough on the land of another borough with the permission of that other borough; but if that permission is not granted, the borough can be overruled by the Minister. So, in effect, the powers are there if they need to be used. But one would very much hope that the whole problem would be worked out in close co-operation between the boroughs and the Greater London Council.

I would remind your Lordships that the Greater London Council will continue the powers of the London County Council in respect of slum clearance for as long as the Minister desires and until he designates the day when those powers shall cease to operate. Therefore, it seems to me that the Greater London Council have a great power to influence local authority housing in London, when it is remembered that they have to collect and collate the register of all the borough housing lists so as to be able to judge the future needs of housing in London as a whole. This register should make

much easier the transfer between boroughs of council tenants. Therefore I think the machinery already exists, although it may be possible to develop it further.

To take up a point made by the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, at the end of his speech, in order that the Greater London Council can develop or assist or influence the future housing needs of London, it is for consideration whether they should have some, not precisely control, but influence at any rate, over the distribution and allocation of privately rented housing. There is something about that in the chapter on foreign countries and cities. But this, of course, entails taking other action in conjunction with such influence or control, and that is something which I should like to mention later.

There is only one other subject I want to mention in respect of local authority housing, and that is in connection with housing subsidies. This brings me to what I believe is the most significant chapter in the whole Report, and that is Chapter 3, on the economic background. It is, I would say, significant for solution. It is not more important than the facts set out in other chapters, but if we are thinking of solution, it is an extremely important chapter. Here the noble Lord pointed out the anomalies of subsidies. I would remind him that the last Government initiated a review of housing subsidies with this very thing in mind: that more subsidies should go to the areas where they are needed most, and probably less to those not requiring so much. I hope the noble Lord who is going to wind up the debate will be able to tell us how far that review has progressed. I think it should have made substantial progress by now, and I hope that we may be getting some decisions on this matter very soon.

A particularly interesting fact which comes out of this economic chapter in respect of local authorities is the average rate of interest they pay—namely, 4·17 per cent. in 1957-58 and, five years later, in 1962-63, only 4·53 per cent., and this in spite of the much higher rates during that five years' period. This is due, of course, to the admirable pool system they are allowed to operate, spreading the rents evenly over the houses built before the war and those built subse-

quently. People sometimes talk rather emotionally and passionately about the outrageously high rates of interest. It is worth bearing in mind that it does not make so much difference to local authority housing rates of interest as one might suppose.

The object of mentioning that fact is to point out (this is about the only thing which I think the noble Lord opposite failed to point out in his review of this Report) that the housing associations are forbidden to operate a pool system. That means, according to the restrictions of the law, that they have to make separate agreements every time they enter into an agreement, either with the local authority or the Registrar, to promote a new development, and it is based on the current rate of interest. The Milner Holland Report has this to say:

"These restrictions are entirely artificial. They have no economic justification, and make it difficult for the managers of a large housing association to operate a rational overall rent policy for property built on many different dates."

It seems most extraordinary why this should go on, and I hope that the Government will relax these restrictions so that the pool system can be operated.

I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, that there is immense scope for housing associations to provide new housing. That is what we want: new housing at reasonably low rents; not for the lowest income group—I am sure the local authorities will always provide that—but for the low-middle income groups, perhaps the hardest hit of all, who cannot go to local authorities or afford the high rates of private landlords—or afford them only with great difficulty. When you think about it, out of 19,000 houses owned by the seven largest associations—that is, about two-thirds of all the housing association property in London—only 843 have been built since the war. We must do better than that. Therefore, let us help the housing associations.

I would ask the noble Lord, Lord Mitchison, early though it is, if he has any information about the progress of the Housing Corporation that we set up under last year's Act. The noble Lord, Lord Silkin, has intimated that they are finding it difficult to raise money from

[Lord Hastings.] the building societies. I should like to know whether that is so; but, in particular, can the noble Lord tell us what progress is being made? I hope that things are going well. If the Government are willing to take action, first, on the pool system in reference to the housing associations, and secondly, in connection with taxation, which is equally important, then I believe we can achieve a big contribution to the provision of new housing in London.

I turn now to the question of taxation. This not only affects housing associations, except for the charitable ones—most of them are non-charitable—but refers to private landlords, as well. As the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, has pointed out, no deduction of any capital they repay, or of any revenue put into reserve funds for future repairs—in other words, a depreciation allowance—is allowed for tax purposes. There is a table on page 36 which shows the extra cost to the tenant of a housing association compared to the cost of a co-owner, who gets tax relief in the same way as an owner-occupier or the tenant of a charitable housing association—that is, the minority. The difference in rent is £2 8s. 0d. in the first year of a mortgage on a house costing £3,500, to £3 12s. 6d. in the 20th year. Those are substantial figures, entirely due to taxation.

Even more serious is the problem for the large property companies who pay profits tax as well, bringing them to the combined rate of 10s. 9d.—and, presumably, there will be another 6d. added in a week's time. This means that the return on the improvements they carry out on their dwellings is of the order of only 0.43 per cent. over fifteen years. They can make it fairly economic over a period of 25 years (that is dealt with on page 38). I said fifteen years, because the basis on which we give improvement grants is that the house must have only a fifteen years' life. How can companies or individuals carry out improvements on that sort of basis of return? I agree entirely with the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, that there is little scope for the private landlord in providing new houses in London. But I believe there is scope for the private landlord who is a property company, who at least will have the finance avail-

able to do it if in other ways it is made possible for him to operate on a fair return. But, of course, not the individual landlord—he cannot possibly come into it.

In general, as a result of taxation, the comparable weekly net rents of a house costing £3,750 are, for the local authorities £2 7s. 0d.; for an owner-occupier £4 7s. 0d.; for the housing association £5 9s. 0d., and for a private landlord £7 1s. 6d. Surely the private landlord, if these taxation concessions were allowed, could reduce his rent to at least that of the owner-occupier, and the housing associations to a good deal less, much nearer that of the local authority.

That brings me to the final chapter on International Comparison. There is here set out Government assistance available for privately rented housing in the major cities of Europe and in New York. These include loans or subsidies to landlords, subsidies for selected tenants—which is, to my mind, a particularly interesting feature which might commend itself to the Government—and, of course, tax exemptions for depreciation funds. The result is a far higher proportion of privately owned dwellings. Obviously we have to push up the total number—we know that now. Since one-third of all dwellings in London are privately rented, and two-fifths of the population live in them, it is equally obvious that full use must be made of, and full encouragement given to, the private sector if we are to satisfy the demands both for new houses to rent and—this is very important—for adequate maintenance of the existing stock. This is affected enormously by the incidence of taxation. Therefore, subsidies and tax exemptions in the cities are linked to rent control and security of tenure, and these matters are inseparable. The noble Lord, Lord Silkin, spoke at length on security of tenure. I am not going to do so, because I have chosen to lead up to it through the economic background, and to show what needs to be set in the same context as security of tenure.

In view of the information we had at the Ministry of Housing before, it will not surprise the noble Lord that we had a very good idea of the necessity for security of tenure. After reading the Report, I can say that I think we can all accept that security of tenure in London is necessary;

and if that is so a degree of flexible rent control must accompany it. I put the emphasis, of course, on the word "flexible". One can at least congratulate the Government on introducing this sort of system in the new Rent Bill, which is now being published. But I would point out that we do not yet know how flexible this rent control is going to be, or how fair rents will be arrived at. It is also to apply to the whole country, which we do not at all accept is necessary, and this is something that must be separately argued on another occasion. But we must at all costs avoid the ill-effects of rent control, so roundly condemned by this Milner Holland Report, and they will not be avoided, nor will the shortage of sufficient or adequate housing in London be overcome, unless the Government take the necessary action suggested by the factual findings of the Report in respect of housing associations and private property.

4.15 p.m.

LORD AMULREE: My Lords, I should like to join with the two noble Lords who have already spoken by expressing my admiration for the clearness with which this long Report has been presented by Sir Milner Holland and his Committee. When I first took it up I knew nothing at all about housing in London. When I put it down I felt that I knew a very great deal about it. Whether that knowledge will remain, I should not like to say. Certainly it seemed to me a most remarkable document. There are two matters to which I want to refer. The first stems from what has been said, both in the Report and by the two previous speakers, about the need for more rented accommodation in London at reasonable rents, rather than going too far with owner-occupied dwellings, which are an admirable thing but I do not think will serve the purpose at the present time.

In passing, I should like to raise one matter with the noble Lord who is to reply. I wonder whether he knows what amount of residential accommodation in London is at present occupied by Government offices. I can think of quite a number of blocks of buildings which were constructed originally for private residences but are now Government offices. I am sorry I did not give the noble Lord notice of that question, so perhaps he will not be able to give

me an accurate answer at the present time.

One of the points I wanted to urge was the position of the housing associations. That has already been gone into at great length by the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, and I do not want to repeat everything he said, because with most of it I agree entirely. It seems a great pity, and very sad, that whereas the housing associations which are registered as charities—those which form part of co-ownership and co-occupation—do not pay tax, the other type of non-profit-making housing association does. I am sure that discourages housing associations in their work, and if that anomaly could be removed or changed I am sure we should get more rented accommodation coming along at a comparatively reasonable price. In fact, I believe the Report says that, if the loan period could be extended from 40 to 60 years, a three-bedroomed house could be let on the 60-year basis at a rent of £260 a year, as opposed to £275 on the 40-year basis. That seems to me one reason for taking some action on that. When I read the account of the debate which took place in another place on this subject, I thought there was some ray of hope in what the Minister said about this question; so possibly it is already in the back of the Government's mind, and something may come out of it in due course.

The second point I want to raise is not a very big point but an important one, and that is the question of the allocations of dwellings by local authorities from their housing lists. I realise that this is an extremely delicate subject. It is something in which I do not think the Government can interfere at all, because the local authorities, even the new boroughs in London, will, I am sure, be extremely touchy on this point. But there are one or two points which I should like to bring forth. The first thing I want to say is that it is quite essential that there should be a good deal of rigidity about these lists. They must be quite fair. You cannot have people, as the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, said, jumping the queue as they do at cinemas, because it will cause even more trouble than it does there.

But one finds a certain difficulty in a real emergency involving some local

[Lord Amulree.] authority houses. It applies particularly to people of whom I see a great deal, that is, elderly invalid people. I believe the Report says that about 40 per cent. of single or widowed persons live by themselves, and a large proportion of them are elderly. One of the difficulties one always comes across is that if it were possible to move elderly persons from totally unsuitable rooms into suitable rooms, a great number of breakdowns in health might be avoided and, therefore, a great amount of money saved to the nation. But it is a very difficult thing to do.

May I quote to your Lordships one example which I have always thought a particularly striking one? There was an old man in his eighties whom I knew, whose wife had died quite a long time before and who lived in a single room by himself. I admit that the room was not too bad, but I cannot remember at the moment whether it was on the ground or the first floor. His health broke down and he came into hospital and was offered two obvious alternatives: one, to go to a local authority home, which he absolutely refused to do; and, second, to get an apartment with his daughter who lived in a one-room flat in an adjoining borough. That also was found to be absolutely impossible, and neither of them would budge. Either the daughter had not been there long enough, or the man was not thought to be suitable—I forget which. Therefore he had to go back home again.

In fact, he went back twice, if not three times. He broke down in health and needed to spend a long time in hospital because the strain of looking after himself was too much. He would not go to a local authority home—and in that regard I am bound to say he has a great deal of my sympathy. After about four years, the borough in which his daughter lived agreed to give him a room; not sharing an apartment with his daughter but living fairly near so that she could keep an eye on him. That is the kind of case to which I am referring when I say that housing should not be so rigid. That was a case in which nobody could accuse anyone of jumping a queue. It was merely bringing two relatives together so that one could take care of the other and thereby save breakdowns and a large amount of trouble.

I believe the Report mentions that it is difficult to provide local authority accommodation for these old people who, for the most part, are living on their pensions. It is indeed true, because one sees in the Report figures of elderly people on National Assistance who live mostly in privately-owned rooms, because the rents there are a little lower than the local authority can afford to charge. It means that the rooms cannot be taken care of and repaired because the amount of money coming in to the private landlord is not enough for him to carry out this work.

There are two other disconcerting things in this Report. It says that a not very luxurious standard for housing would be one room per person, and according to the Report 1½ million persons in London do not get the equivalent of one room per person. There may be all sorts of reasons for that which may be quite proper. It may be that they are young married couples who want only one room, but even then I should think that they perhaps need two. This seems to me to be a deplorable thing.

Another group who have great difficulties, though they might succeed in winning through in the long run, are the families with a large number of children. There is very little accommodation for them. If they are living in unsuitable accommodation the children quite often need to be taken into care for a certain time until accommodation is found. Again, that seems to come within the points I was talking about on the lack of flexibility in housing. More accommodation should be available for big families. People do have large families, and one has to face this fact.

I have noticed that many local authorities do not provide enough accommodation for elderly people, and not enough accommodation whereby a couple, when they have brought up their family who have married and gone away, can leave the big apartment they no longer need. In many cases they do not want to be rehoused a long way from all their connections and everything they know. Therefore I would suggest that when new dwellings are provided they should be a "mixed bag", some big and some small, so that such people if they wish to be rehoused can fairly simply be rehoused in not such big accommodation.

My Lords, before I sit down I should like to join with the Report and with what noble Lords who have already spoken have said in paying great tribute to the work of the L.C.C. as a housing authority. They have a very experienced department, with people dealing wisely and sensibly with a good deal of variety, and I know that a number of boroughs would not have been able to cope with their problems if it had not been for the help of the L.C.C. Whether we shall find the same housing troubles in the new boroughs which come into operation at the end of this week I simply do not know, but I trust that the Greater London Council will be able to assist them in much the same way as the London County Council has been able to assist the people of London who required housing.

The trouble with housing in London goes back a very long way. One might almost say that it goes back to 1915 when the rule came in that rents should remain at the 1914 level plus 15 per cent. That went on a very long time and matters got bogged down. That, I think, has caused a certain amount of administrative difficulty and muddle and has led to the difficulties we have now and to the deplorable conditions which the Milner Holland Report shows occur in this town, one of the wealthiest towns in the world.

4.28 p.m.

THE LORD CHANCELLOR (LORD GARDINER): My Lords, the Report which we are debating to-day is a most comprehensive and valuable survey of the present state of London housing, and the Government are most grateful to my friend Sir Milner Holland and his colleagues, not only for the excellence of the Report but also for the speed with which they have succeeded in producing it. As they themselves say, they have throughout their work been conscious of a sense of urgency; and when one examines the facts which they have illustrated and put together, primarily in the Appendices, one realised what a stupendous task it is to have achieved in such a relatively short space of time.

My noble friend Lord Silkin has a long experience of London housing, first as a distinguished member of the London County Council for many years, and since then here and in another place;

and we could have had no better introduction to this debate than what he had to say about security and harassment, which are questions of human relations, and about problems of condition and general shortage which involve an examination of the stock of houses in London. The members of the Committee were directed to give particular attention to the use, maintenance and management of rented accommodation, whether privately or publicly owned, and to the relations between occupiers of rented accommodation and private landlords. Although I was for a time an alderman of the London County Council, I have not been particularly concerned with some of the matters my noble friend dealt with, and I propose to devote most of my attention to the conclusions in the Report, about the relations between landlords and occupiers, not only as regards private landlords but also as regards other forms of ownership of houses. The Report itself is a survey of the housing situation and primarily directed to the present situation; but it contains many comments and suggestions for the future. Such suggestions are, of course, not binding on the Government and were not intended to be so; but they are none the less of value.

Two chapters of the Report are concerned with particular problems or, rather, with the particular forms that the general problems of London housing have taken, in some cases of particular difficulty. Chapter 7 examines abuses, and these have been of such a startling character as to attract particular attention in another place and in the Press. They have occurred in connection with privately rented accommodation, and their extent is statistically small and largely, though not entirely, confined to a limited number of boroughs. evertheless, as the Committee conclude:

"Abuses are general and too numerous to be dismissed as isolated instances or in any way insignificant."

The other particular case I want to refer to is that of coloured landlords and coloured tenants, about whom the Committee conclude that the difficulties are the same in quality as those of other newcomers to London but accentuated by various factors. Both these cases relate to housing rented from private landlords. They are, however, the acute symptoms of

[The Lord Chancellor.]
a more general disease, the shortage and condition of London housing, and we must consider what form remedies can take and what use can be made of available agencies.

The area covered by the Report is the conurbation of London, including the Greater London Council area and a few suburban areas around it. In mid-1963 local authorities owned just over half a million dwellings in the Greater London Council area, and rather less than one household in five lived in local authority property. Housing associations accounted for a comparatively small figure, and about two out of five households rented their accommodation from private landlords. The remaining two out of the five households were in owner occupation. There has been a decline in recent years in the privately rented sector, partly as a result of the change to owner occupation, and partly because of demolitions or of acquisition by local authorities, either for letting or for demolition. Among owner occupiers in 1960 nearly one in five would have preferred to rent accommodation, and the lower the family income the higher the proportion who would have preferred to rent.

There has been little buying of rented property as an investment, and many large landlords, including the Church Commissioners, have sold, finding the ownership and management of many houses both uneconomic and embarrassing. New landlords have appeared, buying as a speculation to get as many tenants out as soon as possible and then to resell at a profit or let for multi-occupation. Even a compulsory purchase order has its uses for them: they use the compensation money to repeat their performances elsewhere. Except as regards purpose-built flats and other comparatively expensive accommodation, private ownership of housing has neither provided a satisfactory investment for the landlord nor met the requirements of people with small incomes, who seek to live in London or have to live in London, often because of their job. It has been, by and large, a failure, entailing in some cases grave hardship to occupiers, or would-be occupiers, and to their families.

Public authorities have some economic advantages in the methods they can em-

ploy to borrow capital on favourable terms, in getting subsidies from the Exchequer and, if need be, from the rates, and in having a pool of houses, many built when land was cheaper and building costs were lower, so that, if they pool rents, they can let new houses at lower rates. An interesting table, Table 3·8, in the Report shows how the weekly cost of local authority accommodation in a newly-built house is considerably less than the weekly cost of such a house rented from a housing association or a private landlord or occupied by its owner. Roughly, the cost of a local authority house by the week is about a third of what the rent would be if the house were let by a private landlord, and about a half of what the cost would be if the house were occupied by its owner; that is, after allowance for the tax relief to which the owner-occupier would be entitled on a mortgage.

It is clear that the public authorities are best able to provide for those lower-paid workers who have to live in London, but the proportion of local authority housing in London is still smaller than the general proportion over the country. The Government's aim is to increase the house-building programme in London from just over 26,000 to about 35,000 dwellings a year, and the vast bulk of this increase will be by local authorities. Some large areas of surplus Government and railway land are being made available—enough to provide homes for 30,000 more families, and use will be made of industrialised building methods.

The Committee were much impressed by the achievements of the London County Council and by the need for such a large central body able to concentrate its resources where there was the greatest need and to employ a highly skilled staff. The Greater London Council will now be able to develop those advantages; and of course the new London boroughs have their part to play.

In short, my Lords, taking the Report as a whole, there is no doubt that a vigorous attack on the housing problem in Greater London is due and overdue. At the end of 1964, there were nearly a quarter of a million more households in Greater London than there were separate dwellings, and a shortage of dwellings of this order is without parallel elsewhere in Great Britain. The result is not only

multi-occupation, the herding together of people, the inconveniences, the lack of ordinary facilities, the effect on mental and physical health; not only overcrowding, with all the damage it does to family life; but also, at the end, an appreciable residue of households without any home at all, living, as best they may, in welfare accommodation. I will remember, from my time with the London County Council, how, after the Rent Act 1957 was passed, the appalling number of families turned into the street every day continually grew. With my noble friend Lord Silkin, I remember how, only last year, in the Bill with which we were then dealing, many of us pressed the then Government to deal with *Rachmanism*. A provision could have been included in the Bill by means of an amendment, but the Government declined to deal with it in any way. The whole problem is one of grave urgency, and it is one in which the major part in finding and applying a remedy must, in the nature of the case, be played by the local authorities.

The housing associations, no doubt, have a subsidiary but important part to play. The Committee point out that they have suffered from fiscal disadvantages which have made it difficult for them, particularly for those which are not charitable bodies, to provide houses at a sufficiently low annual cost. My right honourable friend the Minister of Housing and Local Government considered the possibility of changes in the tax law in order to help them. Your Lordships will appreciate that this must be a matter for my right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I now turn to some financial questions. The Table I have mentioned shows that the weekly cost of accommodation in a house newly built at a capital cost for house and land of £3,750, is £2 7s. if the owner is a local authority; £4 7s., after tax relief, if the owner is the occupant and has borrowed on mortgage; and £7 1s. 6d. if the owner is a private landlord. Moreover, the Report makes it perfectly clear that the landlord's financial difficulties, if he charges a reasonable rent, have not diminished in recent years. One result has been some cases of exorbitant rents, another a pressure on landlords and by landlords to sell houses if they can get vacant possession. Among

average or low wage-earners, such as unskilled workers, the gross rents now paid by tenants of private landlords in Greater London are much the same as those of local authority tenants. But the provision of new houses for rent by private landlords will not meet the needs of unskilled workers; for the rents of new houses would be beyond their means.

The average wage of labourers in London in June, 1964, was about £15, including overtime. If one follows the Committee in assuming that a reasonable rent for such earnings is about £3, that is well below the rent of £7 1s. 6d. to which I have referred. The reason why the present average rents are so much lower is that the accommodation provided includes all the worst housing in London. It is, of course, also true that private landlords, particularly companies, provide most of the expensive accommodation, with which this Report is little concerned.

Mention has already been made of that section of the Report comparing the position here with that in foreign countries. My right honourable friend the Minister of Housing has rejected any suggestion of a subsidy to provide private rented housing. He pointed out that the evils, to which I have referred only in general terms, are virtually limited to private rented property; that you did not have them in local authority housing or in owner-occupied housing, and that the reason was that the service which the landlords provide, cheap rented housing, is at once unprofitable and in short supply. Security, however, can be provided under the flexible rent regulations which are contemplated in the Rent Bill. If private landlords are to play their rôle in conjunction with public authorities and housing associations they will have to prolong the life of their property by repairs and improvements. In any case, their rôle is a limited one, mainly, it seems, to providing the more expensive accommodation.

Private landlordism, despite all the assistance and encouragement it has received from successive Conservative Governments over the last 13 years, has failed to provide the accommodation required by the worker of average or less than average earnings who has to live in London. The main development

[The Lord Chancellor.] of the future, therefore, must be in increasing the scope and spread of publicly-owned housing, not only for Greater London but also in the new towns further afield. When all is said and done, what is wrong is that there are not enough houses. I think I referred in the debate we had on immigration to the extent to which I had always been impressed by the fact that when, after a good start made by the first post-war Labour Government, starting from scratch in the early 1950s, we had got up to 300,000 houses a year, we not only did not stick at that but went back. There cannot be any real difficulty, if you can build 300,000 houses in a year, in building 325,000 in the next year.

LORD HAWKE: My Lords, may I interrupt the noble and learned Lord for one moment? He will recollect that during the period of the Labour Government there were strict controls on repairs, and so on. When the Conservative Government came into office those controls were lifted and a tremendous volume of repair work, postponed from earlier years, was conducted at the same time.

SEVERAL NOBLE LORDS: Oh!

THE LORD CHANCELLOR: Private repair work may have been done, but when the war ended we had virtually nothing. The first thing we had to do was to build power stations. It takes five years to build a power station. Little credit was given to that Government for starting them. They had to come first. But in the first year we built about 50,000 houses, and by the early 1950s the number was 300,000. I have never understood why in 1953 the number of municipally-built houses had fallen to 204,000. The 1954 figure was 257,000. In 1956, it was down to 176,000; in 1958, down to 146,000; in 1960 down to 129,000, and in 1961 down to 119,000. Thus, not only has that number steadily fallen until last year—Election year—but in houses for people to rent, everything has been handed over to the private landlord, and in public authority housing to rent we have gone down and down; and even last year, Election year, public authorities were building fewer houses to rent than Mr. Aneurin Bevan did in 1948, three years after the end of the war.

LORD HASTINGS: My Lords, may I interrupt the noble and learned Lord for a moment? He is referring to building throughout the whole of Great Britain. This Report is about London, and the relevant figures relating to London do not sound quite so impressive as the figure he is trying to establish. The fact is that throughout the country as a whole we fulfilled a perfectly legitimate and necessary demand for owner occupation to which we all know that the noble and learned Lord's Party is absolutely opposed. If he confined his remarks purely to London, this would have more relevance to the situation, and then he would see that, even if we had maintained in public authority building, figures of the sort to which he has referred, when related to London they would not have made a significant difference to the problems with which we are faced.

THE LORD CHANCELLOR: My Lords, I am all for putting aside Party prejudice, but we really must face the facts. This impartial Report is a devastating answer to everything which the last Government said. Here we have it—a sober, impartial analysis of how the tenants in London's privately rented properties have lived during the last 13 years. After all, anyone who is deeply shocked by this Report, as I should hope most of us would be, knows on whom the responsibility lies, because these conditions have existed only in private landlords' accommodation. The noble Lord, Lord Hastings, referred to the specific figures for local authority housing in London. In 1955 19,000 dwellings were built; in 1956, the number was down to 17,000; in 1958, down to 14,000; in 1961, down to 13,000. This is the real reason for the crisis.

LORD HASTINGS: My Lords, I am sorry to interrupt again, but that is not the real reason for the crisis. There were 480,000 houses short of the necessary number of households in 1951, and there are still 240,000 houses short. The difference of 2,000 houses a year in local authority housing would not have solved the problem.

THE LORD CHANCELLOR: My Lords, the problem could have been solved if, instead of going down, it had gone up. That is the real reason for the

crisis. It is the concentration on housing for those who can afford to buy their own houses, and a deliberate, total disregard by the State of their essential responsibility to look after the weakest and the poorest. Council building was throttled back in the interests of private developers, who were demolishing thousands of rented homes and replacing them by luxury flats and offices. After all, last year 10 per cent. of the entire building force of the whole country was engaged in London, building offices. A good many of us said so strongly enough at the time. I welcome this Report as showing, so far as we did not already know it, where the responsibility lies and what the cause has been, and as pointing the road to the future.

May I close on a somewhat less contentious note? Another fact is drawn to our attention by this Report—namely, the awful state of our housing and landlord and tenant law. I do not think it is so much worse than most of our law, but, on the whole, I think it is one of the worst examples. If the intelligent, educated layman wants to know what is our housing and landlord and tenant law, he has first of all to read 54 different Acts of Parliament extending over some hundreds of years. Then, when he has read and mastered the 54 Acts of Parliament, he has a large number of Statutory Rules and Orders to master. And, provided he has done all that, he is left with the 8,041 reported cases which have devoted themselves to the true construction of the 54 different Acts of Parliament.

It may be observed by some of your Lordships that the Rent Bill—which we are before very long, I hope, to have an opportunity to consider—is itself one in which the first clause is as bad a piece of legislation by reference as I have seen, and we all know how appalling the Rent Restriction Acts have been. But there is a reason for this. The reason is that when there are successive Governments of the same Party, then before a General Election they have access to all the services of the Government Departments, they have the services of the Parliamentary draftsmen to draft their legislation and can get everything ready. Whereas when there is a change, the new Party coming to power have had none of those services, or the services of Parliamentary draftsmen. Thus, in the time available it has

not been possible to adopt any other method than legislation by reference. But on Thursday, I think, your Lordships are going to consider the Second Reading of a Law Commission Bill, and it may be, as I hope, that that will point the way to the future.

4.52 p.m.

THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON: My Lords, may I join in expressing gratitude to the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, for providing the opportunity for discussing this most important Report, which I believe will take its place among the social documents of our own generation? It is, of course, a great personal regret that a longstanding engagement to preach in the City makes it impossible for me to hear the whole of this valuable debate, and I should like to apologise in advance to your Lordships for my early departure.

May I also associate these Benches with what has been said about the sense of indebtedness to Sir Milner Holland and his colleagues, both for the skill and thoroughness with which they have investigated a problem of such great complexity and for the speed with which they have completed the task—the more so because the material which they needed was not readily available. They have shown, with a wealth of detail, both the extent of the problem of providing adequate housing for the people of London and the factors upon which the solution of the problem must depend. Those of us who in various ways have been concerned with housing and homelessness in London knew that the situation was bad. Now we know factually how bad it is. For my own part, though I had a good deal of information, it still came as a shock to realise the situation as a whole and to see that we are facing not merely a desperate shortage of housing but a quite deplorable amount of sub-standard housing.

It is quite appalling to find that, in the Year of Grace 1961, 31 per cent. of the households in the County of London were entirely without access to a bath, and that in 1963, according to the tenant inquiry, only 17 per cent. of the privately rented households had all five of the standard amenities—and not very high standards at that. Half a million households without the use of a bath at all,

[The Lord Bishop of London.] and only a shared W.C. ; 155,000 households living in one room, 40 per cent. of them without their own sink and stove. These and similar statistics reveal an amount of human unhappiness and potential degradation which a civilised country ought not to tolerate. Overcrowding and lack of facilities have to be stated in statistics and in terms of households ; but households mean people, and people mean families and children. I thought yesterday, on Mothering Sunday, as I was referring to the need to build up and develop still more the sense of family life in our country, that one important aspect of that was to provide the conditions in which it is possible for a family to live a decent family life.

It is against the background of the inadequacy of housing, both in amount and in quality, that Sir Milner Holland and his colleagues have dealt with the abuses of the landlord—tenant relationships and the extent to which tenants have been subjected to ill-treatment, harassment or abuse. They have confirmed again what many of us feared: that hardship and misery have been created on a substantial scale, even though it would seem that the great majority of landlords treat their tenants fairly and decently. The small minority of landlords who are guilty of malpractice must surely be either punished or deterred by fear of punishment. If this requires an extension of the criminal law—a subject on which I am not competent to have an opinion—I hope that Her Majesty's Government will not hesitate to introduce the necessary legislation as quickly as possible. The Report tells us that there are at least 3,000 cases a year of abuse of some kind, ranging from physical violence to the cutting off of essential supplies. We know that the figure runs at about that size ; but even if we knew that it was only one-tenth of that, surely action must be taken to make it impossible for the unpleasant landlords to practise unpleasantness without greater unpleasantness to themselves. I would also support the plea that effective measures should be taken to give greater security of tenure, especially to those who suffer most from insecurity— young parents with large families who are least able to find alternative accommodation.

Enough evidence was given in the Report of the Committee to show that the possession of children is an extreme disadvantage when looking for a house; and the fact that you are going to have a baby is almost the surest means of ensuring that you have not a home in which to bring up the baby. Most landlords are human, and not all families are perfect tenants, but it is clear that there is a very considerable amount of hardship, which is likely to increase as the amount of accommodation available at rents which those in the lower income group can afford decreases. The long-range answer is clear: we need a great many more houses. But in the meantime the short-term hardship must be dealt with. It is good to hear from all sides of the House support for the principle of giving greater security of tenure, and for providing in legislation that tenants shall not be evicted without a court order, so that they can be legally secure.

Although slum clearance and rebuilding at lower densities create temporary problems, I hope that the result of the present critical housing situation will not be a reduction in the rate of slum clearance. I know from the reports which I receive from the clergy in my diocese, and from my own observations, that the gain in human happiness cannot be overstated. Rehousing in tall blocks of flats undoubtedly creates its own problems of community life which needs far more sociological study than it has yet received. Something of the old neighbourliness may be lost, but the gain in dignity of living outweighs that loss. It is vitally important that when we are planning for rehousing more thought still should be given to the creation of valid communities. It is not just a question of providing a great many houses at such-and-such a density: it is a question of providing neighbourhoods which make sense to those who live in them and create in them a sense of belonging to a community.

To achieve simultaneously a lower density and increased provision of housing is clearly impossible on the former sites and, in the total view, may be impossible within the boundaries of the London conurbation. But it does call, as the noble and learned Lord has just said, for the use of the available sites—such sites as the railway and coal yard at Marylebone—to the fullest extent. The delay in

releasing this particular site, in spite of repeated promises made over two years, and the apparent reluctance of the Railways Board to make it all available for housing now, is causing much local resentment. I hope that this is a situation which the Minister of Housing and Local Government may inquire into again, in the hope of rather more speedy action than has yet been forthcoming.

The facts revealed in this Report as a whole cannot but arouse feelings of deep indignation in the minds of those who study them. But what is almost as disturbing as the facts is to realise, as the Report makes clear, that the terrible conditions still existing are not due to lack of concern on the part of the local authorities or on the part of Governments. Great efforts have been made, not least by the London County Council, of whose enlightened concern about the people involved I have some personal knowledge. But the problems have grown faster than the solutions which anybody has been able to produce, and, as the Committee's Report puts it in very restrained language:

"If the growth of housing does not match the growth of employment there will be trouble of some kind."

I believe that the inescapable conclusion is that there is needed an effort on an unprecedented scale to deal with the situation, if the problem is not to continue to grow worse. This calls for a unity of purpose which must transcend any differences of political outlook, in the sense in which the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, himself defined it. As I see it, the need is that we should stop looking backwards and should look forward to what must be done in the light of the information which we possess. For, my Lords, what is at stake is the happiness of human beings and the security of family life.

The Report speaks rightly of the "paradox of squalor in the midst of progress". In Chapter II it shows the complexity of the reasons which have produced this situation. Against that no single solution is likely to be effective. Neither market forces nor the provision of more houses alone will solve the problem of housing the population which London needs to maintain itself. It would seem that not only a unified purpose but one unified control is neces-

sary. It is neither fair nor sensible to leave the problem to be solved by the boroughs alone; and direction and control by the Greater London Council, which is possible—though the provision for it may have to be strengthened—is both logical and right. But public and private agencies must find their own ways of making their contributions within an overall policy.

Of one relatively small sector of voluntary effort I can perhaps speak with some knowledge. Last week I took the chair at a meeting of various groups which sponsor housing associations, especially those connected with religious bodies. We had no difficulty in reaching agreement on ways in which any kind of overlapping or duplication of effort could be avoided. The contribution of housing associations may not be very large, in comparison with the total need, but the spirit of co-operation evoked by the situation there is the spirit in which I believe the whole problem of London's housing must be faced and can be faced.

5.4 p.m.

VISCOUNT GAGE: My Lords, I cannot claim any first-hand knowledge of London's housing problems, but I am connected with the housing society movement, and I am really rising with the sole object of supporting what the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, and other speakers have said on their behalf. I have listened now to a great number of debates relating to housing in your Lordships' House. I have taken part in some of them, and have noticed that a certain pattern of argument seems to develop. There is nearly always an eloquent and poignant speech from the Bishops' Bench, and I remember so well the great knowledge and fervour which Dr. Garbett, who was afterwards Archbishop of York, used to display in this field. But, apart from that, the debate usually falls into a pattern where, on one side, the evil of the private landlord is pointed out very strongly, and, on the other side, the inadequacy of local authorities as the sole agency for housing is equally stressed.

In those circumstances, one sometimes feels that any suggestion of a non-Party character is apt to be looked on, if not as an irrelevance, at least as something which cannot have very great importance.

[Viscount Gage.]

I think that some evidence of that is provided by the fact that in the recent debate in another place, although there were references to housing associations, and favourable references, too, the total amount of space occupied by those references was only about two columns out of a total of about 128 columns. This House seems to have done rather better.

A number of speeches have been made dealing with the housing association aspect, and I was very glad that the right reverend Prelate also brought in this subject. However, I noticed that there was some change in the general enthusiasm in certain quarters of your Lordships' House when the noble and learned Lord the Lord Chancellor brought the debate back to what I might call its accustomed rhythm. But in the field of housing associations, I am glad to feel that Ministers of Housing and Local Government have more and more turned to them as a sort of third force in the housing problem. I think it might be noted, too, that in a perfectly private capacity both Mr. Henry Brooke and, more recently, Sir Keith Joseph have been active in sponsoring and helping in their own private housing association. I think this is evidence, if it is needed, of the sense of conviction which they had, after their term of office, of the usefulness of these societies. We have had the powerful support of the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, who knows a great deal about London's housing; and I am glad that the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, supported them.

As has been mentioned, the Milner Holland Committee obviously did not feel justified in making any positive recommendations. But they did spend about twenty pages of their Report showing, in very closely reasoned argument, the difficulties under which these associations and societies work. I do not think they would have put themselves to all that trouble if they had thought that no action was likely to follow. Housing associations enjoy all-Party support, as we have heard, and there is no doubt that there is much advantage to be gained from them, and from the fact that, so far as I know, there have been connected with them no great scandals, which have such a powerful news value in these days. But, for these very reasons, they have not had a great deal of publicity, and, although

your Lordships' House obviously knows a great deal about them, there are many people who have never heard of a housing association or a housing society, have no knowledge of their work, and still less of their capabilities.

I need not repeat what has been said this afternoon about their nature, but I would stress that they are of all kinds, catering for the very poor and for the comparatively rich. There are some associations, particularly those associated with the great foundations, like the Guinness Trust and the Peabody Trust, which have thousands of houses, and other, much smaller, associations which may possess only one or two; but, broadly, they are divided into two groups—namely, whether they have charitable status or not. My Lords, I must candidly say that I have never quite discovered on what this definition depended, other than that an association enjoying a charitable status was one which the Board of Inland Revenue thought should enjoy that status. That perhaps sounds a little vague, but I am making no complaint about it because the Board have always exercised their discretion in an admirable way, and I certainly should not suggest any alteration. But a great deal does turn on whether an association has charitable status or not. The question of taxation and the question of subsidy often turn on it.

It may be remembered that Sir Keith Joseph devoted a great deal of energy and enthusiasm to the setting up of the type of association which works without subsidy, and that culminated in the setting up of the Housing Corporation. I cannot speak for the Corporation, which has just started operations under the chairmanship of Sir Caspar John, but I can say something on the £25 million pilot scheme which was entrusted to the Federation with which I am connected. I may tell your Lordships that, after some preliminary teething troubles, it worked extraordinarily well, and has provided within the London area something like 4,500 units of housing to be let at rents of between £4 and £8. Now I appreciate that rents of this sort are outside the capacity of anybody but the higher-paid worker, and I also appreciate that unless something is done on this tax question, unless something is done to relieve them of having to make

repayments of capital, and the accumulation of reserves from taxed income, then, within five or ten years, these rents are bound to go up, possibly by £2 or £3 a unit.

Nevertheless, the scheme has so far been a success, and I think it augers very well for the Housing Corporation. It has supplied £25 million worth of housing hitherto, and I have no doubt that in a few years the £325 million assets of the Corporation will be fully utilised. I agree that that extends all over the country, but I think £325 million worth of housing, of which London will no doubt get its due proportion, cannot be considered anything but quite a serious contribution to the housing situation. When we come to the lower-paid workers, I agree that I do not think housing associations can do much for them unless the law is very much altered. I think they must remain with the local authorities. But I think such associations can do and are doing a lot for those elderly people who get the benefit of National Assistance, and who provide those cases where the subsidy can come in.

There are societies which are building units to let at £3 a week, which is the kind of rent which is easily borne by National Assistance, but results of that sort have been reached only by extreme efforts and by the raising of a good deal of charitable money. In the London area, 192 charitable societies of various sizes are working, of which 81 are particularly concerned with the aged. I notice that the Report does not foresee any great future in the field of housing the poorer people through the agency of housing associations, particularly the smaller ones. I suppose that may be true, but I should regret it if it were true, because on occasion it falls to me to visit these smaller societies and to open new homes, and sometimes extensions. I believe that if any of your Lordships accompanied me on those expeditions you would come back with an absolute conviction that there ought to be many more such institutions.

I think that if one studied how they had come into existence, one would be rather amazed that they had been built up at all, because, as I have said, they are usually the result of the efforts of a few amateurs, with very little paid

help, if any at all. These people not only have to go through all the administrative actions that are necessary before anything can be built—the security of a site, the choice of a house for conversion, the architectural planning, the securing of loan sanction and of by-law sanction, and the obtaining of planning consent—but, on top of all that, as a rule, they have to raise money by fund-raising activities. I really think that their task is rather too hard.

We in the Federation of course give such help as we can. We have a small paid staff, and we have a subvention from the Government. It is not a very great subvention, but we are grateful for it. It is a deficiency grant of up to £15,000 a year. On that point I know that one rural district pays at least £5,000 a year for its housing administration and that they look after 900 houses. This Federation is supposed to look after 1,000 societies and a great number of houses—I cannot say exactly how many, but a great number. Therefore it would not appear that this is a great strain on our national resources; nevertheless, I am very grateful for it. But, as the Report so clearly brings out, we cannot hold out much hope of great improvement without a review which will be, at the same time, both sympathetic and comprehensive. We must, I think, get out of what the Report describes as “this legal and financial maze”.

My Lords, I hope something will be done. I think housing associations have demonstrated what they can do, and they have earned general praise. They are a real bridge between the local authority type of house and the private house. Although it may be very reactionary, certainly in my part of the world it is not everybody who wants to live in a council house—and that may be true even of London. The housing societies cater for all classes and there is no feeling of any kind. They have no bitter memories such as exist in so much of the private enterprise housing which tars all the good and the bad landlords with the same brush. Finally, nearly all the local authorities, except possibly the most doctrinaire—though I do not think I have ever met one—are only too glad to have the help of these bodies in bearing their overwhelming burden. Whether anything will be done depends upon the respective Ministers of Housing and, of course, as

[Viscount Gage.]

we have been reminded, on successive Chancellors of the Exchequer. Certainly, the present Minister has expressed great sympathy with this movement. We have been lucky with two Ministers, and we may be lucky a third time—at least, I hope we shall be.

5.21 p.m.

VISCOUNT COLVILLE OF CULROSS: My Lords, I am sorry that after his impassioned political speech the noble and learned Lord the Lord Chancellor has had to leave us for the moment, because the first thing I wanted to tell him was that, as he expected, I was horrified by what I read in the Milner Holland Report. I should also, had he been here, have been very interested to ask him where in that Report he found the causes for the indubitable shortage and appalling problem that faces us—at any rate, the causes that he read out. No doubt he would have made it very instructive for me and would have given me the page number and references so that I would follow. For myself, I have seen no suggestions of any sort along the lines he made out to your Lordships.

If I may say so, I rather regret the way that at least the Front Bench of noble Lords opposite seem so smugly to revel in what I believe to be an entirely assumed wisdom, after the event, about all these matters. I cannot believe that noble Lords had at their finger tips, and have had for years and years, all the knowledge and all the details set out in this Report so that they can now say: "I told you so—and have been telling you so for many years." It is strange, if this is the case, that they have not been pointing for many years (and do not do so now) to the failures of their own policies, as well as of the policies adopted by the Party to which I belong.

I should prefer, at any rate if I can, to accept this Report as containing some new thinking on the subject, thinking which has not hitherto been obtainable by anyone. And I believe that this is, in fact, the truth. Otherwise, my right honourable friend, the Member for Leeds, North-East, the last Minister of Housing, would hardly, with the resources at the disposal of his Department, have set up this Committee in order to tell him what he apparently

would have known already, had noble Lords opposite been telling the truth on this matter. I prefer the approach of the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, to this matter and also the suggestion of the right relevant Prelate, the Lord Bishop of London: that instead of looking backwards we should look forwards. This I shall try to do. And I shall found myself not on political histrionics but on what the Report contains and the suggestions it makes for trying to solve the problems.

As I see it from the reading of this Report the chief difficulty concerns the housing of the lowest-paid workers and people retired on a fixed income. That is what the White Paper which accompanies the new Rent Bill says. But, in addition to those people, if it does not comprehend them, the difficulty certainly arises over the housing of newcomers to London, and the young married couple before they have many children—those who are setting up their first homes.

There are three agencies dealing with the problem: the local authorities; the housing associations, about which I should like to say no more, having heard the speech of my noble friend Lord Gage; and the private landlord. It is on the question of the private side that I should like to say a few words this afternoon, because it is clear that two-fifths of the people in rented accommodation live in the private stock of houses, and that these are the people suffering the greatest hardships and privations. The problem, moreover, is getting worse, because that very stock of houses for letting on which they depend has been decreasing, between 1960 and 1964, at the rate of a quarter of a million lettings, which is an enormous amount. No doubt they have also suffered from insecurity of tenure; and that is another matter on which I should also like to say a few words.

The financial difficulties of dealing with these people, and of giving them houses they can afford, are covered in Chapter 3 of the Report. The first thing I should be grateful for the noble Lord, Lord Mitchison, to touch on this evening is the way in which the solution put forward by his Party—at any rate by the noble and learned Lord the Lord Chancellor to-day, and by his right honourable friend the Minister a week

or so ago—is going to work. The quotation I took from the speech of the Minister is this:

“Obviously, the job of replacing rented housing should be taken over by local authorities and, obviously, it should have been made their top priority.”—[OFFICIAL REPORT, Commons, Vol. 709 (No. 82), col. 77, March 22, 1965.]

The use of the past tense is another echo of these political histrionics which I hope I may now ignore.

But what worries me most about this (and perhaps your Lordships will look at page 52 of the Report) is the fact that the Report appears to draw the conclusion that, if one brings up to date the incomes on which the Report bases its tables, for the purposes of that chapter, two-thirds of the tenants could not have afforded a large council house and one-half of them could not have afforded a small one. If that is the case, it must be a broken reed upon which the Government intend to rely: that the only way by which they intend seriously to solve this problem is to increase the stock of housing built by the municipal authorities, I do not think that they do so entirely intend; but I should be interested if the noble Lord could explain how it is that, when the people in the greatest trouble are the ones who can least afford rent, the housing provided by the local authorities, with all the financial advantages they have, nevertheless appears to be too expensive for them.

Apart from that, I wonder whether I might suggest to the noble Lord a few other points about the provision of council houses to make up for the lack of cheap housing, either in the private sector or elsewhere. A certain amount has been said about the provision of land; and there have been some windfalls in London recently. I should have thought it probably was correct to try to prevent the erection of more office building in the centre of London—not, I think, for any doctrinaire reason, or necessarily because too great a proportion of the labour force is being used on it, but just because it encourages more people to come and live here. We are at the present moment faced with a grave difficulty about any sort of planning policy in the Greater London area as a whole. The development plans which cover the area are the result of the deliberations of four

planning authorities: the London County Council and the three fringe counties who dealt with their own Metropolitan fringes. And Heaven knows when the Greater London Council will produce anything in the way of a comprehensive plan to deal with the whole of its area—let alone when the Ministry will finally confirm it!

May I make a plea to noble Lords opposite? If they have any influence whatever in the matter, now that they are the Government, can they do something to improve the speed at which development plans are approved, once they have been submitted to the Minister and a public inquiry has been held? Nevertheless, the situation is going to be that there will be four different bases for planning in the London area and, from my experience, they conflict fundamentally with each other in a number of principles. I hope that, with the particular problem of housing in the London area in mind, some sort of interim policy will be produced fairly quickly by the Greater London Council and approved by the Minister, so that people may know on what they can base their decisions for the future, in regard to not only housing, but also other matters concerning planning in general. The answer to the question of London also requires to some degree an answer to the problem of the South-East.

I feel that there is going to be a considerable time lag before anything substantial to the solution of this problem can be contributed on the ground, ready to be lived in. I also suggest—though I appreciate that it is a difficult matter to deal with—that until something substantial can be achieved from the present starting line on enormously increased numerical basis, council housing is hardly going to provide a solution to housing the newcomers, the people on the lowest incomes, young families who have not yet got any children, who comprise a large number of the “hidden” households which the Report considers. These are the people for whom housing lists do not provide, people who are at the present moment in privately rented houses, and who go to the bottom of the housing lists, if they ever get on to them at all. It is all very well to say that we must leave the local authorities to look after this, but, for quite understandable reasons, they do not provide

[Viscount Colville of Culross.]
houses for these people. This fact has to be faced when noble Lords opposite say, a little blithely, that the complete answer is that the municipal sector should be stepped up, as should have been done years ago. That is by no means the whole answer.

One thing that must be done is that the existing stock of houses must be maintained, if possible. We must try to prevent any more reasonably sound, rentable houses from being taken out of renting, by seeing that they are kept in proper repair. At this moment of crisis the best advantage must be taken of every house than can be lived in by people who are in special need. No doubt, as the Report suggests, we ought to aim at ideal standards for tenants. If that could be achieved, so much the better, but I do not believe that is possible. And even at a lower standard, it is essential to do our best to keep houses at present in existence.

I am not sure (although I do not wish to go into the subject deeply to-day; there will be another occasion) that the Rent Bill recently introduced is necessarily going to be a hard one for the landlord, provided that he has his rent adjusted according to the condition of the house—he can put up his rent if the house is a better one than a similar house in a worse state of repair—and provided that his tenant is going to be there, even if he has a certain security of tenure, paying his rent all the time, and provided that, if he is an unsatisfactory tenant, he can be got rid of quickly so that a good tenant can be put in. The situation would be changed very little for a proper landlord and a proper tenant. The provisions that exist at present, however, by which the courts give orders for possession work so slowly that they discourage landlords either from using them at all or from entering into the field of renting. I cannot see why the private landlord cannot play a perfectly proper part in providing accommodation for rent for these people—at any rate, as a stop-gap.

One of the difficulties which is apparent from the Report is that the shortage of houses to let at a low point has so far prevented its own cure. The statutory powers that are available to

local authorities could not be used here because, if a tenant complained, he got evicted, or, if something was going to be done about the house, the tenant would have to leave in order that the house could be repaired. Possibly the noble Lords' Bill will repair this difficulty. I hope that local authorities will make use of the powers in the 1961 and 1964 Acts which were intended to assist in tackling these bad conditions.

Incidentally, one of the things that noble Lords opposite might like to consider is that in conditions of shortage, multiple occupation, which is at the bottom of a great deal of this difficulty, tends to increase, particularly in the areas surrounding the centre, and it is difficult for local authorities to prevent this from happening where it would be undesirable because in most cases, at any rate where self-contained flats are not going to be provided by the conversion of a house, planning consent is not required. At the present time, a Private Bill is going through Parliament promoted by the Birmingham Corporation. In that Bill the Birmingham Corporation seek power to say whether or not in a certain district—I think that the criterion is the district—a particular house should be turned into a multiple occupied house. I believe that, either under powers similar to that in the Birmingham Bill, or else by amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act, it might be possible for the local planning authorities to control the areas in which multiple occupation takes place. Of course, this is a small point, but it might be of assistance.

LORD SILKIN: My Lords, is the noble Viscount aware that there is provision in the Planning Act which requires permission where a house is to be divided into two or more separate dwelling-houses?

VISCOUNT COLVILLE OF CULROSS: My Lords, that is what I was referring to. If the conversion is not going to produce something which is self-contained, so that it will fall within that definition—and quite a number do not—then the Town and Country Planning Acts do not bite. I am grateful to the noble Lord for making this clear. I am suggesting that it might be worth considering whether this provision should not be extended.

Meanwhile, I do not think that noble Lords opposite, on reflection, are going to say that the private landlord is going to have to get on with it and grin and bear it. I believe that they will decide, in the light of this Report, that in the contribution he has to make to this problem he is going to require some assistance. I believe that it is important to distinguish between the two spheres in which the private landlord may operate. I do not suppose that a great contribution is going to be made by private persons building new houses to let at the sort of rents of which I am talking. I should have thought, to be straightforward, that it was not worth their while, when they could build houses of a much higher value which they would be able to sell or rent at much higher rents. It is no good being unrealistic. I think that is the fact. On the other hand, a number of private landlords possess older properties, which figure so largely in this Report, and it is a different matter when we ask them to repair these properties and bring them up to date.

I would suggest to noble Lords opposite, now that they are in Government, something that I think they ought to know. A few years ago I bought—perhaps very foolishly—a large house in the country, and at the back of it there are three flats. Two of them are in reasonable repair, and the other one I am now proposing to do up. I thought for a long time before I decided to do this up, for two reasons. First of all, as I said loudly and clearly in the course of the Committee stage of the Housing Bill of last year, the discretionary grant of £400 does not begin to come to half of the amount one needs to spend on a comparatively modest repair and conversion of a house in these days. There is no getting away from this. I know it, because what I am doing is quite modest.

The other reason is this. If you have private property at the moment, there has been so much bandying about in the political world of the position of the landlord—whether or not he should receive encouragement, and whether one Party will jump upon him and give his tenant such security that he will never have any freedom again—that I believe the whole political atmosphere has affected the desire and the ability of landlords in

general, and particularly small ones like myself, to get themselves involved in the matter. I would rather have kept the flats empty. I feel that if one contribution can be made by the Milner Holland Report and the debates upon it, it is that noble Lords opposite should make it clear that they do wish the private landlord of existing property to play his part, and that they will assist him to do so. Let us go on with the grants, and let us consider the tax, if necessary. And I should not make that an entirely open-ended guarantee either, because I do not believe that private landlords, who may, for all I know—and I believe, as the Report says, that two-thirds of them are—be in this as an ordinary commercial investment, should be allowed to have tax concessions or something of that nature without giving a *quid pro quo*.

I am attracted to some of the matters in Chapter 12 of the Report, and I hope the Government will consider closely whether they cannot devise some scheme into which private landlords can enter—I suggest voluntarily—so that if they choose to abide by the rules they will be eligible for special tax concessions, for subsidies, or whatever it may be, in order to repair their property. I would not let them have them for nothing. I suggest that they should enter into a scheme. I appreciate Lord Silkin's point that the only body that could possibly supervise such a scheme would be the local authority, and it might be too much for the private landlord to stomach if they interfered with every small arrangement he made in connection with the property. But it has been done abroad, where there are local authorities, and I hope the Government will see whether the parallel can in any way be applied to this country, so that we may take advantage of the best of what has been done, apparently with some success, in other countries.

So, my Lords, I welcome this debate. I hope that the climate that has been introduced by this Report will be carried over, not only into the Rent Bill but also into such later legislation as noble Lords opposite may have time to introduce. I hope it will lead to some measure of co-operation between private landlords, local authorities and the Government. For too long, I think, has there been a sort of antipathy, a fear by the private landlord

[Viscount Colville of Culross.]
of what the Government will do or of interference by the local authority, which does not happen where you have reasonable people on both sides, or even where you have a reasonable person on the landlord's side. I believe this would revolutionise the situation so far as the private sector in existing buildings is concerned, and that any measures taken upon this particular front will make a contribution, not many years in the future, but now, from to-day or from the moment when the measure is introduced. I therefore hope that noble Lords will introduce some such measure, or a series of measures, very soon indeed.

5.45 p.m.

THE LORD BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK:
My Lords, broadly speaking, in looking for the answer to this large political problem, we must look in two directions. First, we must look at the needs of those who would buy their own houses and flats, and of those who would rent them; and, secondly, we must look at the response in house-building from private sources, from public sources and from the "no-man's land" of the housing associations which exist between the two.

It was the late Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who, as Minister of Health, introduced the Bill which was to bring into being the building societies. Mr. Chamberlain made two broad points about them. One was that when working people could buy their own houses they would have a stake in the country, and would not, therefore, be politically revolutionary. And the other was that, as they moved into the suburban areas where their new houses would be bought, we should be breaking up the homogeneous working-class areas which to him were so politically frightening. I cannot myself follow all that was then said. But it is clearly desirable that everybody should have a stake in his country; and decent housing accommodation from which people may not be irresponsibly moved is, I think, an essential part of that stake. It follows that all who wish to buy their own houses and flats should be able to do so, and also that those who cannot afford to do so, or who wish to rent, must be able to do so. It is not unimportant to realise that the less rented housing accommodation available, the more the mobility of labour is diminished.

We are discussing a major public problem. It is a problem that can be solved only by major public effort. There is, I think, no case for advocating piecemeal attacks upon it by private builders and landlords, subsidised by public funds. By all means let private building continue, but it must do so at its own charges. We are not now concerned with the production of housing as profitable business, with the business side of it subsidised by the taxpayers: we are concerned with the public provision of a public service. Housing associations (and there are 180 charitable housing trusts in London) are in a different category from private building; but they can only scratch the surface. I have been associated with one in South London for which several thousand pounds have been raised free of interest charges—in fact, as gifts. Even so, to date the number of homeless families that we have housed is only ten. What is more, if all the money had been borrowed, instead of being donated, we could never have afforded to rent the accommodation to these homeless families at rents which they could manage.

To what extent the Government should expect charitable organisations like housing associations to help solve London's problem is an arguable point. But if they do, they will need to look again at existing legislation, so that the associations can borrow money on terms which will enable them to bring the rents within the reach of the sort of families that most need to be helped. Legal, fiscal and borrowing facilities will have to be radically eased if housing associations are to help at all substantially. The Milner Holland Report makes it clear that there is not a serious shortage of accommodation for those who can pay rent of £400 a year or upwards. The serious shortage, the shortage which leads to stress and abuse, is the shortage of houses for renting to people with low incomes. And what I urge the Government to do—and I hope that we shall receive an assurance to-day—is to guarantee that public authorities will increase the number of houses to rent to people with modest means, people who cannot possibly afford the sort of rent usually demanded for private accommodation.

Again, at this point it must be faced that constant demands for wage increases

are inevitable unless enough housing space is available at rents which are very much below this figure, and that this is simply not going to happen without large-scale public planning. It is my own belief that one of the first duties of the Government on the home front is to tackle this problem and, where it lacks the power to do this, to take the necessary powers. Many things, of course, are involved: cheap loans for housing to local authorities; powers to buy land at fair prices; powers to secure that building materials go where they are really needed—which might well have to include the emergency making of bricks—and priorities in the supply of labour. The last Census showed 40,000 houses empty in Greater London. It is disgraceful that this accommodation should be left to a speculative development market. The area of the Greater London Council has a smaller proportion of publicly owned houses than anywhere in the country: 1 in 5, compared to 1 in 4. It should, of course, be greater in London than elsewhere.

It is at this point that we meet a major problem. There is great variety in the practices of local authorities within the London area in almost all matters relating to housing. But the overwhelming need is that London should be treated as a whole. There is need to build in the outer suburbs to relieve the pressure in inner boroughs; there is need for a highly qualified housing planning staff for the whole of London. Under the London Government Act, 1963, the powers of the Greater London Council are to survey the whole area, and to discover by consultation how far each borough can meet its own needs and what help it requires from other boroughs. Then the Council have power to acquire land subject to the consent of the borough, or of the Minister, and to build upon it. This means that there can be no overall planning for London housing development, save by the consent of 33 local authorities or by piecemeal appeal against them. This means that in present circumstances there can be no general attack on the immense social evil of bad housing in the London area unless we have immediate legislation on this matter. I hope that the Government will give us some encouragement on this point.

LORD CHAMPION: My Lords, I am sorry to interrupt the right reverend Prelate, but this may be a convenient moment to interrupt the debate in order to receive a Message from the Commons and for the Royal Commission. I beg to move that this debate be now adjourned.

Moved accordingly, and, on Question, Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL SALARIES AND MEMBERS' PENSIONS BILL

Returned from the Commons, with the Amendments agreed to.

House adjourned during pleasure.

House resumed.

ROYAL COMMISSION

6.0 p.m.

The following Bills received the Royal Assent:

Consolidated Fund (No. 2),
Armed Forces (Housing Loans),
Superannuation (Amendment),
Ministerial Salaries and Members' Pensions.

House adjourned during pleasure.

House resumed.

MILNER HOLLAND REPORT ON LONDON HOUSING

6.15 p.m.

Debate resumed.

THE LORD BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK: My Lords, when I was "guillotined" I was about to say that there were two further questions that I wanted to ask the Government before I sat down. I will now amend that to two further questions that I would ask the Government after I have sat down. First, what steps are to be taken to ensure that our building resources, men and material, will be used in the right

[The Lord Bishop of Southwark.]
place for the right thing and at the right time? Physical controls, licences and rationing are understandably unpopular. But what alternatives do the Government propose if the country is to get the houses, hospitals, factories, universities and schools that it needs? To put the question bluntly, can men and resources be diverted from what is unnecessary to what is necessary, except by controls?

Second, even though controls may be necessary, they can be only a temporary palliative; they cannot provide a permanent solution. A permanent solution demands an all-out effort to speed up and to develop building techniques. Old-fashioned methods and restrictive practices not only add to our difficulties but make it well-nigh impossible to reach our goal. I understand that last year only 25,000 houses were put up by industrialised building techniques. What is 25,000 when we remember that we need 500,000 or more? I know that local authorities and building firms may find the use of these techniques expensive, but if the Government would encourage the councils and the other authorities to club together and place bulk orders, the situation might be different. So my question is: what are the Government doing to hasten industrialised building techniques, the sort of thing that is happening in some countries on the Continent. I believe that unless we grapple with this problem, there is no hope of solving this complex situation.

My Lords, I have recently read through some of the speeches that my predecessors have made earlier in this century on the subject of housing in London, in particular the speeches of Dr. Garbett who, though known to some of your Lordships as Archbishop of York, was for many years Bishop of Southwark. A survey over 50 years leaves me with two impressions. The first is of encouragement. On a limited scale much has been achieved, and the sort of scandals to which Dr. Garbett and my predecessors drew the attention of your Lordships' House have been partially overcome. That is encouraging. But the second impression is less favourable: that no Government have made an all out attack. Instead, action has been

piecemeal. Local authorities have usually done their best, but it has been bow-and-arrow affair, not modern weapons. It is my hope that this Government, with the support of all Parties, will tackle the housing problem in London with the imagination of a war effort. This spirit alone will provide the people of London with what they most need—homes. And it is on the home that the security and wellbeing of our country and nation depend.

6.20 p.m.

LORD ILFORD: My Lords, the authors of the Report which we have been discussing this afternoon expressed the view that what, above all, was in their opinion needed for the remedy of the evils into which they had inquired was what they called "a common frame of mind". Housing, they said, had for too long been the sport of political prejudice. The authors of the Report were rather naïve if they considered that a document of this explosive character, with all the opportunities for rhetoric which it presents, was likely to be received in that manner. Like my noble friend Lord Hastings, I would not suggest for a moment that the subject of housing should be treated as a non-Party subject.

It is right that it should be the subject of debate, but it is a subject which gains nothing from being debated in a highly controversial tempo. The noble Lord who introduced this discussion treated the subject in that manner; that was the course he took, and I listened to him, as I have listened to him for many years past, here, in another place and elsewhere, with the respect which I feel for his knowledge and experience in these subjects. The noble and learned Lord on the Woolsack took a different course. In that course I do not propose to follow him.

I desire to say something first of all about the effect which I believe that the planning policy which has been carried out by the planning authorities for a good many years has had upon the problems of congested areas and overcrowding with which this Report deals. It has been, since the war, the policy of the planning authorities in London to reduce the density of population in the central areas of London. That is an aim which is wholly admirable; but I believe that

that policy has contributed in a major degree to some of the overcrowding which to-day exists in the central areas. The opportunity for reducing density of population in a particular area arises when a slum clearance scheme is being carried out or when properties are being demolished for the purpose of constructing new roads or other buildings, often public buildings.

It is not possible to rehouse on the sites which they have formerly occupied the whole of the population which is displaced by these clearance schemes. They are offered by the clearance authority alternative accommodation, usually in other parts of London. They may be offered alternative accommodation at places quite a considerable distance from that part of London in which they have been accustomed to live. A case was brought to my notice the other day of a tenant who was been evicted under a clearance order in Paddington. She was offered alternative accommodation at Richmond. To a person who has spent her life in Paddington, Richmond is like the other side of the world.

What happens? Alternative accommodation is offered in another area. Some go. Perhaps many go. But not all go. Quite a large number of persons who are offered alternative accommodation in some other neighbourhood reject it. They just go round the corner and take the first room that they can find, in a "roomed" house, sharing sanitary accommodation, kitchens, baths (if there are baths), perhaps with two or three other families. In that way the effect of a clearance order for slum clearance or for clearance needed for new road construction is, I believe, adding to the overcrowding which exists in the central areas.

The Committee were conscious of this, because in their introductory chapter they say that

"It frequently proved impossible within permitted densities to build enough new dwellings on the sites made available by slum clearance to rehouse on them as many families as had previously lived there".

After the first chapter, the Committee seem to have paid little attention to the problems which these clearance orders arouse. What is the answer to this? I myself have never been convinced that high densities of population are so necessarily undesirable and bad as many

people regard them, provided that the area is to be laid out afresh, with proper reservations for open spaces and for other amenities. Provided that the area is to be laid out afresh, I do not think that it is such an important aspect of the replanning that the densities of the population should be reduced as drastically as the planning authorities are seeking to reduce densities to-day. There are, indeed, in the Report of the Committee two photographs of developments—an old development with a density of 200 persons to an acre, and a new modern development, carried out by the borough of Finsbury, with the same density of population.

Of course, it means that one has to accept much taller buildings. I was glad to hear the right reverend Prelate the Lord Bishop of London advocate the use of buildings much taller than we have been accustomed to erect in London. It is quite true that a flat at the top of a 14-storey block is not perhaps an ideal place to bring up young children, but it is a great deal better than a single, overcrowded room, sharing sanitary accommodation and all the rest of it. I see no alternative to the problems of overcrowding which clearance orders present, unless we are prepared to accept buildings much taller than we have been accustomed to in the central areas of London.

I saw in *The Times* recently a most interesting plan of the new circular roads which are being planned for London. I could not help asking myself how much misery, distress and overcrowding the construction of these roads, and the clearance of the sites for them, is going to cause to the population of London. After all, the needs of the population come before the needs of the traffic. But there it is. With a different standard of height and a different standard of density in the area, it may be possible to rehouse, in the districts to which they are accustomed, many of the people who will be displaced by the construction of these great new roads.

I should like now to turn for a moment to the part that private enterprise plays in the solution of these problems. One of the things that astonished me about the Milner Holland Report was that it constantly returns to the subject of the position of private enterprise. I per-

[Lord Ilford.]

sonally do not know that I have any ideological preference for private landlords' houses. Indeed, I think I have been more of a local government man in the past than an advocate of private enterprise housing. But I was forcefully struck by the reiterated emphasis which the Milner Holland Report places upon the part that private enterprise could play in the solution of London's housing difficulties. It has always surprised me that private enterprise has never entered the field of constructing houses to let.

Private enterprise, with all its flexibility, all its adaptability, has always shown itself ready when any public demand arises to meet that demand, and to meet it very adequately. Private enterprise has met fully and completely the demand for houses for sale. It has never attempted to enter the field of erecting houses to let. Why is that? Why should this particular field of activity be an exception to the conditions which seem to promote private enterprise in almost every other field? The answer is not far to seek. There is always the shadow of control. Private enterprise will not go back into the industry of building houses to let so long as the shadow of unrestricted control remains hanging over it.

The Milner Holland Committee were at pains to draw attention to a number of different directions in which they felt that private landlords could be brought back into the housing field and made to play their part. Indeed, whatever their views about private enterprise, it is quite clear from the proportions of families who are to-day housed in privately rented houses that no comprehensive solution of the problems of London housing can be reached unless adequate use is made of the contribution which private landlords are able to make.

I hope that when the noble Lord comes to reply for the Government he will tell us whether it is intended to attempt to make use of the service of private landlords and, if so, in what directions the Government are contemplating moving. I hope that he will not tell us, as I think the noble and learned Lord on the Woolsack told us, that the Government did not intend to make use of private landlord housing at all. If that is so, it seems to me that the solution of London's housing problems is going to be made very much

more difficult than the circumstances of the case require.

The odd thing about the Milner Holland Report is that it gives the landlords a very good name. I think that in one part of the Report it is calculated that 68 per cent. of the uncontrolled tenants are satisfied with their landlord-tenant relationship. The Report says very forcibly that the great majority of landlords are not the undesirable type but persons who find themselves in very difficult and embarrassing financial situations with controlled tenants, without the means of maintaining their property, and unable to comply with sanitary orders if the local authority makes one. I hope that the Government will not be too ideological in their approach to this subject but will make use of the private landlord in the various ways suggested in the Report.

May I now say a few words about Rachman? Rachman is, of course, a very highly controversial subject. The Report shows very clearly that Rachman was not really the creature of the Rent Act, 1957. It may be that his operations were assisted or changed in some ways by the passing of the Act, but Rachman began his operations before the Act had been passed. He began his operations in 1954, and we know that he and those like him were working in London long before the Rent Act came out. Indeed, in some ways it is more true to say that control produced Rachman rather than decontrol.

What happened? All over London there are landlords who own a little property. There are many small landlords. One must not forget that real property, and particularly housing property, was the favourite form of investment for working-class savings in years gone by. There were many landlords who owned a run of three or four terrace houses in London. The landlords' rents were controlled, and sometimes restricted to the rents charged in 1914. In such cases the rent income was insufficient to enable the landlord to maintain his property in a proper manner. If the local authority served a sanitary notice he was not able to comply with it. Eventually he gave up in despair and sold his property for the best price he could get for it.

That was Rachman's chance. He bought property all over London at rubbish prices, prices at which even the controlled rent gave him quite a good return. He then set to work, by the methods which have been exposed, to get rid of his tenants. Once he got a controlled tenant out, the procedure was that he brought in a few pieces of furniture and claimed that the letting was a furnished letting. In the end, a county court judge had to decide whether or not a table, an armchair and pieces of linoleum constituted a furnished letting.

All that was going on long before the Rent Act was passed. It is true that after the Rent Act was passed Rachman did not bother to furnish his tenements. He could let them free from control. But the thing that brought Rachman and his friends into this business was the fact that they knew they could buy at rubbish prices property out of which they could make quite a handsome return, even with the restricted and controlled rents they received. That is one aspect of Rachman's activities, and it is an aspect which ought not to be forgotten.

In conclusion, may I join with other noble Lords in expressing my appreciation at the colossal industry of Sir Milner Holland and his associates? May I unite with that my appreciation of Lord Silkin's contribution by the tone and manner in which he opened this debate to-day.

6.38 p.m.

BARONESS GAITSKELL: My Lords, may I, too, add my gratitude to my noble friend Lord Silkin for initiating this debate on the Milner Holland Report? He was particularly worth listening to, both because of his experience in housing and because of his legal experience. At this point in the debate I shall try not to repeat the points already made, although this is somewhat difficult.

The Milner Holland Report is an admirable Report, not less good for being a very modest Report. It is modest in its claims. It makes no pretence of being an exhaustive record of London housing, though it was got out in record time. It is also very modest in its conclusions. It sets out a clear picture of hardship alongside affluence. After reading through the Report in the rather fitful way that I

adopt when dealing with so many figures, certain salient facts stand out in my mind. I shall refer to only a few figures: 180,000 people on waiting lists in 1962; 7,000 homeless in 1964; 230,000 dwellings short in 1964. Another item very dear to a woman's heart is the comment that it would take 30 years to modernise all the existing council property.

I saw quite a lot of both old and new housing when going on political tours all over Britain with my husband. I feel rather smug now, when my observations happen to coincide with those of the Milner Holland Report. But on reading the Report about London, the facts seemed to swell to such an enormity, to such a big problem, that I indulged in a bit of fantasy. I felt that there was only one solution—to seal off London and to stop people coming into the city. Only then could we begin. But this, as I say, is just mere fantasy.

The fact is that the growth of employment, as the Report notes, has far outpaced the growth of housing. No proper planning can be done, one without the other. As has been pointed out already, the Committee said that housing has been the sport of political prejudice. It is true that retrospective recrimination is the sport of incoming Governments. But let there be no mistake about it, my Lords, decisions taken on housing needs are political decisions—and here I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Hastings. The clamping down on office building by the new Labour Government, when they took office, was a political decision of critical importance for easing the housing shortage. When there is a shortage of accommodation such as we have in London at the moment, and you go on building offices, in effect you are merely creating jobs for homeless workers. There is a time when a Government should discourage people from coming into the centre of a city. In fact, I believe that there must be a very tight control of office, industrial and commercial building. I believe that this is essential at the moment, and it may, indeed, involve payment of proper compensation. Nothing short of long-term planning can tackle the serious situation outlined by the Milner Holland Report.

The main conclusions of the Report cannot help giving satisfaction to the Labour Party, whatever we may say

[Baroness Gaitskell.]

about tackling the problem from a non-political point of view. Speech after speech made all over the country stressed the need for building houses for rent ; but they fell on deaf Conservative ears. That was the reason why we criticised the reduction of building subsidies for local authorities. For years the free market acted in a social vacuum, house building and legislation taking little account of the changing social pattern. To-day we have a position in which old people do not want to live with their children. To-day we have a position in which children do not want to live with their parents. You have to lock up your daughters to prevent them from sharing flats with their friends, and these flats are sometimes suitable for working-class families. The young marrieds would sooner outlaw their in-laws than live with them ; in fact, it is almost a social stigma. The new social pattern that we have come to spells independence for every age group, but this multiplies the number of dwellings that we shall require in the future.

The Milner Holland Report made a good start in collecting the facts, but more research is needed, and much more information. It is good that the London Government Act, 1963, legislates for this. The Milner Holland Report renders good service, disproving some popular explanations of the housing shortage. One of the most popular political prejudices is the story of the rich tenants of subsidised council houses. The implication is that the tenants are living on the immoral earnings of local authorities, because many people think, in their ignorance, that the rates and taxes are money extorted for nothing in return. There is no truth whatever in this view. In fact, one of the tables shows clearly that the owner-occupier gets tax relief equivalent to the local authority subsidy on a house.

The Report defends, and pleads for, the rôle of the private landlord. I myself have no prejudice against the private landlord, and one of the good things that the Report does is to get rid of the idea of the Dickensian landlord. Really, there are very few of these to-day. I myself have noticed that the relations between landlord and tenant sometimes become very bad, especially in the low-rent areas. My husband and I used to

stay in his constituency in South Leeds, in one of those back-to-back houses which are so typical of that area. This was a very good house, in spite of its being back-to-back. It had a bath in it, but the toilet was halfway down the street and was shared by four families. It seems to me that only the bad relations between the tenants and the landlord stop them from getting together, paying for the improvement and getting their indoor sanitation. I could see no other reason why this house, which had a bath inside, could not also have indoor sanitation.

However, whatever contribution private landlords can make to this problem—and they can make some contribution—the major task must fall on local authorities. Local authorities are really good landlords. They maintain and manage their property well. The Report pointed out that the worst housing existed where there was least local authority housing. The Report states categorically that the normal operation of the market does not eliminate the worst conditions, “which are bad and becoming worse”. Whatever one can say about the original Rent Act—it might have been modified over the years—it gave security of tenure to many people. The 1957 Rent Act took this away. No one who has not experienced it can imagine the hardship of insecurity of tenure.

The Milner Holland Report gives the green light to much of Labour Party policy on housing. The new Rent Bill which has just come out, and which we shall later be debating in this House, has a solid, humane basis. It provides conciliation to encourage good landlord and tenant relations, and to persuade them, with the help of local rent officers and tribunals, to agree on fair rents. Some people will say, “It is unworkable, it is doctrinaire, it is bureaucratic.” These are magic words of taboo, spoken simply to delay action. But when we look at other cities—New York, Paris, Stockholm—we find that they have their rents fixed and reviewed ; they have an increase in rents for improvements ; they have the true value of property assessed.

I was greatly interested in what the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, had to say about the tax reliefs which private landlords receive. I myself did not notice them when I looked at the Report, but

I shall do so after what he has said. In some cities, too, owners are guaranteed a minimum return on their investments. The restraints are, in fact, concentrated on the poorest tenancies. In other cities, the proportion of private tenancies under rent control is higher than in London, and security of tenure is more easily available. All this kind of information is extremely useful to us, and we can learn much from it. What they can do we can surely do as well. We can match the efficiency of their administrative officers and tribunals. The Government have laid plans to tackle this gigantic problem, this serious housing shortage, and they are greatly helped by this excellent Report. Only political prejudice and quibble and delay can hamper the start they have made to try to provide the number of houses we need for our people.

6.50 p.m.

LORD WOLVERTON: My Lords, in the very few moments for which I wish to address your Lordships' House tonight I should like to thank the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, for putting down this most important Motion and for giving us a chance to discuss the Milner Holland Report. Nobody in this House, I think, has more experience of housing than the noble Lord, Lord Silkin. He has addressed your Lordships on many previous occasions, when I have had the pleasure of taking part in the debates. I have always listened to him with the greatest respect because I know of his great knowledge of this subject, and he is always a fair debater. I should also like to pay my respects to Sir Milner Holland and his Committee for this excellent Report which we are discussing here tonight.

The few remarks I wish to make are on Chapter 3, on the economic side of the problem, which I feel is one of the most important points for the future. Personally, I am very proud of what my Party has done in the last 13 years, and I think there is nothing to be ashamed of when one remembers that it brought down the housing lists from 479,000 to the up-to-date figure of 231,000, as the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, told us it was to-day, although the Milner Holland Report does not go further than 261,247. That is a reduction of 200,000 in the waiting list—200,000 more dwellings have

been provided in the Greater London area—but, of course, the problem now is getting much greater. One of the most difficult problems is to find the land. It was not quite so difficult ten years ago. If you look at the housing return—the latest one I have is for last September—and at the amount of housing now being built in the inner area of London, you see that it is greatly reduced from what it was simply because we have not got the sites. But it is also because of finance, and I should like, for a few moments, if I may, to put in front of your Lordships a suggestion.

The Milner Holland Report has taken a house at £3,500 or £3,700, but I have taken a house at £3,000 because I know that in the outer areas it can be built for just about that. Such a house is very small, of course, with only two bedrooms. It is not, I think, unfair to say that even local authorities have to take 8 per cent. interest, sinking fund and management, on that capital. That would be £240 a year, or approximately £4 13s. 0d. per week. On a £4,000 house, the interest at 8 per cent., again with sinking fund and management, would be £320, or approximately £6 1s. 0d. per week. On a £5,000 house or the flat unit in London, which is much more likely because the costs are very heavy, it would be approximately £400 a year or £7 15s. 0d. a week. However, in the Milner Holland Report, at page 51, the weekly rent of a £5,500 house is given as £3 3s. 8d., as has been earlier quoted tonight, and of a £3,750 house it is £2 7s. 0d. But, of course, there is a very large element of subsidy in that. There is a £2 or £3 a week subsidy.

I was interested to see a report, which I think was accurate (I saw it on a tape machine the other night) that Mr. Fisk, the chairman of the London County Council, said that the average subsidy for London boroughs was £43. Of course, a higher subsidy is paid in London than throughout the country, because in the country areas, such as where I live, for local authorities the subsidy is only £26 a year, or 10s. a week. But, as was described earlier to-night by the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, in the central area of London, where houses are being built on expensive sites, the subsidies are more.

My own humble opinion is that the subsidies will have to be revised, and revised very soon, as my noble friend

[Lord Wolverton.]

Lord Hastings has said. I believe that a great deal more will have to be given by way of subsidies in the Greater London area and in other big cities, and less in other areas. It will be an unpopular decision with the local authorities in those other areas, who will be very annoyed. But if we are to have more local authority housing built, I am afraid that it will be necessary to give greater subsidies. Because although the lower income groups cannot afford more than perhaps £3 or £4 a week (a fifth of their income, I think, is considered by the experts to be about the right figure) rent, it has been shown to-night that an economic rent would be at least £7 15s. 0d.

Many local authorities have told me that the more houses they build to-day the more they get into debt, and the more they have to put the rents up of the pre-war houses. All the rents are pooled, as the noble and learned Lord the Lord Chancellor has told us, and the pre-war houses are having to subsidise post-war houses because the building costs are going up by something like 10 per cent. a year—a very heavy increase. I am appalled at what it costs to build houses to-day, compared with what it cost seven or eight years ago; but that is the fact. Therefore, in the lowest income group, wages have not gone up in proportion to the rise in building costs.

My Lords, we must either have bigger subsidies or get building costs down by industrialised methods. We have made a start on that, but it does not seem to me that they are any cheaper. They are quicker, but no cheaper. We need cheapness, and, of course, speed. But if we are to solve this housing problem in the next ten or fifteen years, I am sure we must bring in all agencies, as the Milner Holland Report says. We have to bring in not only the local authorities, who do a very good job; not only the housing associations, about which my noble friend Lord Gage spoke to-night, but also private enterprise—not the individual landlord, because I do not think he can afford it, but the big companies, which own tenement houses now and which have come out very well in this Report. There has not been any trouble of *Rachmanism* there. I think they should be helped financially with a subsidy, as is done in Sweden. Sweden, my Lords, has been a

Socialist country for many years, and if they can help their private enterprise to build these houses, I do not see why we should not.

Naturally, there would have to be some control of the rents charged. But unless they are given a quite substantial subsidy, such as is given to local authorities—especially in the big areas, where land is so frightfully expensive, and they have to build very high—I do not think we shall get the houses built. I do not like subsidies, but we have to give them. We give very large subsidies to agriculture; and housing people is vital. A roof over one's head is the most important thing in life. To be able to bring up a family in the Christian way, as the right reverend Prelate said to-day, is a very great problem without it. So, with those few words, I implore the Government to look again at their subsidy policy, and to see whether they cannot rearrange it so as to give more subsidies in these areas where they are greatly needed.

In conclusion, I hope that we shall not have these extremely high interest rates for very much longer. I was checking up this morning, before I came up to London, with my own county council, and I was told that, for seven-day money, the rate of interest is now $8\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.—if you get it: it is very tight—and that for six-month or three-month money it is over $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. That does not help when you have got to borrow large sums of money. I know that we have had balance-of-payments difficulties, and that we have needed a high bank rate; but if this situation and this very high rate continue much longer local authorities will not be very willing to build, because the cost will be penal, both for their ratepayers and for their tenants, since rents will have to be raised yet again.

7.0 p.m.

LORD ST. HELENS: My Lords, I have listened with great interest to the whole of this debate, and I should like to add my thanks to the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, for giving the House an opportunity of discussing this extremely valuable Report. I hope that, without impertinence, I may congratulate him on the extremely moderate way in which he made his speech, avoiding all forms of

Party political controversy. I, too, am going to avoid all forms of Party political controversy, first because I think, as I am sure do we all, that the London housing situation should be put right, and that we must adopt what Sir Milner Holland in his Report calls "a common frame of mind"; and, second, from a rather less idealistic point of view, because I do not really think there is very much to be gained from a Party political "knockabout" over this particular subject. Indeed, those of your Lordships who have read the *Hansard* of another place will, I think, deduce that each side came out about even from the lambasting over this matter. Of course one can make remarks about "thirteen years of Conservative Government", but, equally, there were thirteen years of domination of London housing by the London County Council and the Socialist controlled councils. I do not wish to enter this field; I think it does great harm to the cause and is completely without value.

I should like to say a few words in defence of the good landlord. I make no complaint about it, but the first one heard about the Milner Holland Report was when the evening papers and those of the following day carried banner headlines describing all the terrible things that had happened and which had been written down in the appendices to the Report. I do not complain about this because it is the job of the Press to sell newspapers. While 999 good landlords do not merit one headline and do not sell one extra copy of the newspaper, a single *Rachman* may sell two or three extra editions. But the fact remains that the Report itself, in pages 122 to 127, says that the great majority of landlords behave responsibly. It goes on to say that the Committee were satisfied that most landlords discharge their responsibilities as fully as the rent from their properties permits. Indeed on page 152 there is a table which sets out the number of "satisfied", "fairly satisfied" and "dissatisfied" tenants. Your Lordships will see from that that 88 per cent. of London tenants are satisfied with their landlords and only 4 per cent. are totally dissatisfied. I think the company landlords come out of it extremely well.

I remember that in my old constituency—and no doubt the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, will know the area I am talking about—there was a large block of flats called Du Cane Court. Two or three years ago it changed hands, and many of the tenants were terrified that they were going to be evicted. They sent a deputation along to see me and I wrote to the managing director of the company, which owned a vast block of flats, and asked whether I could go along to see him. He replied that he would come to see me; he did so and said that the stories about eviction were ridiculous. "I will, here and now, give you two guarantees that you may pass on to the tenants of those flats", he said. "The first is that nobody will be turned out for any cause whatever; the second is that nobody will be asked to pay more than they can afford, more than they are now paying". He added, and I thought this was a very sensible remark: "Don't forget, young man" (he called me "young man", about which I was very pleased) "we are in this business not as a short-term measure but in order to make money over a long period. To achieve this we must have satisfied tenants". I always remember that man and I was extremely impressed by the way he and his company were handling their property.

I will turn to the subject of bad landlords. Shortly after the Report had appeared, I was telephoned by a reporter from the *Evening News* who asked me to give my comments on South London housing as a whole, for use in an article that would be published in two or three days. When it eventually appeared, in the *Evening News* of March 16, the article was entitled "London's Little *Rachmans*. Is it so bad in Wandsworth?" The reason they chose to write about Wandsworth was because Wandsworth was the "Number one" on the infamy list, on the "League of Infamy", a list of the small-time *Rachmans*.

But the Press reporter also asked for the comments of the chairman of the Wandsworth Housing Committee. Wandsworth Borough Council is Socialist-controlled, and the chairman of the Housing Committee, Alderman Challen, is a Socialist. He said that his council had received six complaints about landlords and of these they thought only three were worth investigating. All the other

[Lord St. Helens.]

cases came from the citizens' advice bureau ; and this, I think, is very significant, because there is a great difference between the view that a Member of Parliament or a council committee will take on an issue and that taken by a citizens' advice bureau.

I know that when I was in another place I used to hold an advice bureau every Friday night and I would get some complaints perhaps about bad landlords. The first thing that one says as a Member of Parliament or as a council official to people who make complaints is: "It is no good telling me these stories unless you have some form of corroborative evidence. Without evidence it is simply one man's word against another." One has to ask whether there are witnesses, and generally the answer is that there are not. I have never yet received any concrete evidence. The citizens' advice bureau probably does not have to take action in these cases: that is no part of their job. Presumably they simply record the cases without asking for evidence. I am not trying to minimise the appalling harm which is done in some cases, but there are very few complaints on the whole in this area.

Now I will pick up one or two aspects of the Report from a London constituency point of view. First, there is the matter of the police. They have not been mentioned to-day. I was extremely pleased that the police were exonerated, indeed were praised, in the Report. They do a magnificent job of work. People sometimes grumble at them, usually for the reason that the police are powerless to act because the law needs alteration and because people produce no form of evidence, so the police have to ask them to find witnesses before they are able to help. Then there is the question of the tenants themselves. The noble Lord, Lord Ilford, mentioned this when he was talking about the decanting of tenants. This is perfectly true. I saw a great deal of this in the Wandsworth area.

Again the noble Lord, Lord Silkin, will probably know the area I am talking about when I mention Wardley Street by the Wandle River. This was an appalling place in the London of the middle 1950s. The Wandle is a small river, full of every sort of unpleasantness, including even an overflow from a sewage farm. There was

at one time a torrential thunderstorm when the river flooded the surrounding streets to a depth of about two feet. Everything in the ground floor, furniture and clothes, was ruined. I went myself and managed to get an interview with the chairman of the L.C.C. Housing Committee, who was extremely kind, and I like to think that it was possibly due to what I was able to do that we quickly got all the tenants in this street, and of another which was badly affected, rehoused on a great, new, nearby housing estate. I remember going to see the people who had been rehoused. I expected to be received with a great deal of acclamation. I thought they would be very pleased. Precisely the reverse was the case: they were absolutely furious with me. The people who had lived in this street were nearly all costermongers and barrow boys and the street they came from had little backyards where they kept their horses and ponies. When they went to this first-class modern L.C.C. estate, they had to leave their horses and ponies behind and they did not like it one little bit.

All tenants are human beings, and I hope that when the Government begin to develop mass measures, they will treat tenants individually and as human beings. I think it highly desirable, if only we can have it, to have decanting areas near the slum areas that are being knocked down and emptied out. As my noble friend Lord Ilford said, it is particularly difficult for elderly people to be moved out of the street or area they have known all their lives and taken often two or three miles away. They feel wholly lost. Speaking about decanting areas, I am going to say something which is probably absolute heresy. I do not see why, as a temporary measure, we cannot use some of the commons on the fringes of London as temporary decanting areas. In South London where I live, there are many large commons not tremendously used by the inhabitants. A few unpleasant cases have taken place of children being molested on these commons and there are very few parents who allow their children to walk on the commons. I cannot see why at least one of those commons should not be covered with the latest new types of L.C.C. "prefabs", which are semi-permanent, and used as a decanting area for people coming out of slum areas.

Also, in that part of the world, there are one or two hospitals that have large hospital farms which are not used very much, and I believe that they could be used as temporary decanting areas.

I was pleased to hear my noble friend Lord Ilford talking about building upwards. Again in South London we have several large estates of upward blocks of flats. They are absolutely delightful to be in. I know that parents have to caution their children to be extremely careful, because they have balconies and railings. On the other hand, to be up on the 20th floor in London is a really delightful experience. You get above the atmosphere of London and it is extraordinary to look out of a top floor window and see a pigeon sitting on its nest about 50 feet below you. These flats are enormously appreciated by the tenants who go into them. I am sure that we can increase the population density and I do not think it does any harm at all. In Putney and certain other areas the density has been slightly increased and it is extremely effective.

The noble Lord, Lord Silkin, mentioned an overall authority. I entirely agree with him. The Report itself says, in paragraph 225:

“Success depends on a comprehensive grasp of the whole housing situation.”

I am convinced that we must have an overall authority to deal with this problem. The lack of an overall authority, as at the moment, produces a great many of the anomalies which the Report mentions. There is a variation in rebates and subsidies. Some councils have rent rebate schemes; some do not. Indeed, in some boroughs we find an L.C.C. estate and a borough estate side by side, the L.C.C. subsidising their tenants and the borough operating a rent rebate scheme. Certainly the tenants I have spoken to consider this extremely unfair and would like to have it changed.

Another reason why I should welcome an overall authority concerns the question of quotas for new estates. This is always a burning issue in an area where the L.C.C. may be carrying out a large building operation, where only 2½ per cent. of the accommodation is allotted to the local borough, the parent borough, and a large proportion to people coming in from outside from slum clearance

areas. This is very much resented by the locals. One overall authority might be able to give a slightly larger proportion of accommodation to local people. It would also give great help on the question of the qualifications needed by people to be put on to the housing list. Most boroughs operate a system whereby anyone has to be at least twelve months resident in the borough before the council will even consider his name for the waiting list. This produces immense anomalies. For example, someone might be evicted and have to go and stay with mother-in-law in another borough, and his previous qualification of eight or nine months' stay is wiped out and he has to start all over again. I suggest that, with an overall authority, we could get rid of many of these anomalies.

So far as insecurity is concerned, the Government are proposing to take measures so that people may be rendered secure. All I would say is that I hope the Government will make certain that everybody understands what is intended. After the Rent Act was passed I found, in going round housing estates, that the ignorance among some people as to their rights under the law was simply staggering. If they are going to take effective measures, I hope that the Government will produce an explanatory leaflet that can be introduced into every household in the London area. In conclusion, anyone who has had first-hand knowledge of the misery caused by bad housing conditions in London cannot help but welcome this Report. So often we see illness brought on by bad housing conditions, and the tragic separation of families, which results in the launching of young people, who might otherwise have gone perfectly straight, into a life of vice and crime. My last words are that I hope that this Report will not be made an excuse for Party political recrimination, but will be a spur to effective action.

7.20 p.m.

LORD BROCKWAY: My Lords, may I express my sincere regret that I was not able to be here when this debate was opened by my noble friend Lord Silkin? His service in this field, his experience and his constructive contribution to a solution of the problem, are things of which all Members of this

[Lord Brockway.]

House, and not only Members of the Party to which he belongs, should be proud. I should also like to say that I owe the House an apology because I was not able to be here during the early part of the debate. I was engaged in discussions on matters which will shortly be coming before the House.

When I read the Milner Holland Report I was impressed by the fact that its descriptions applied to more areas than London. My noble friend Lady Gaitskell has suggested that it might be desirable, if perhaps a fantasy, to establish a seal around London to prevent a greater population from entering. Her seal would have to extend far beyond London. It would have to apply also to many towns in the South of England which have to face exactly the same problem of populations pouring into their neighbourhoods when no housing accommodation is available.

I had the honour to represent in another place the constituency of Eton and Slough. I took great pleasure in representing Eton. But one of the values of the representation of that constituency was that it gave a knowledge, in the case of Slough, which enables one to contribute to a debate upon housing, because there we have a similar problem to that of London. Slough is a prosperous town. We have at this moment over 1,200 vacancies at the employment exchange. We have workers pouring into that town from the North of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and certain parts of Wales, and when they arrive there is no accommodation for them. Perhaps I may illustrate the problem by reference to one particular aspect of it. Every three months I wrote to each newly married couple whose wedding was announced in the local Press. I heard from 69 of those newly-weds, and not one of those married couples had been able to obtain a house or a flat in which to live: all had had to live with in-laws or in crowded lodgings.

I want to refer to a matter which may have been mentioned in earlier speeches, (which regrettably I did not hear) but to which no reference has been made in the later speeches, and that is the relationship of this problem of housing to the problem of racial feeling where there are large Commonwealth immigrant populations in towns. In Slough we have one of the

largest proportions of Commonwealth immigrants, reaching nearly 7 per cent. When they obtain accommodation, I find that is the greatest stimulant to racial feeling among the residents who are living in crowded conditions. I would illustrate that by reference to the newly-weds to whom I wrote. Three years later, as children began to arrive, they established a young mothers' campaign for houses, and when they marched upon the town hall they carried a banner saying: "Houses for us before the coloureds". That is a natural reaction to this problem.

I am going to ask the Government to be particularly careful how they approach this problem. I regard the coloured immigrants who are in this country as the scapegoats of the housing shortage, rather than as the cause of it. They number in our society only 1.5 per cent. of our population. They are the scapegoats, and they live under the worst conditions. In Slough, the number of coloured immigrants to one room is twice that of the resident population. Nevertheless, I am going to say this to the Government—and it may be a surprise that I should say it. When they deal with the housing problem in London, or in towns like Slough, they must be particularly careful not to give privileges to our immigrant population. The racial feeling in towns which are overcrowded would only be intensified if the Government gave special privileges to immigrant population.

However, there is a method by which this problem can be met. The towns in which our Commonwealth immigrants are resident are also the towns with the worst housing situations. In Great Britain, if one includes London as one town, the immigrants are concentrated in only 33 towns. Those towns, because they are prosperous, are exactly the towns where the housing shortage is greatest and where the need for help to the local authorities in dealing with the problem is greatest. My plea to the Government is that they should concentrate not only upon London but also upon the other towns where the housing shortage is so severe. By providing more accommodation for the residents of those towns they will be reducing the colour feeling which exists, and will, at the same time, be contributing to a solution of the problem of which the coloured immigrants are the victims.

I did not intend to make more than that contribution, but I want to emphasise (the noble Lord, Lord St. Helens, has just urged this) that the housing shortage in our country is the greatest social evil that is in our midst. It causes more ill-health, more breakdowns through nervous tensions, more family severances and more personal conflicts; it is a great handicap to the children born in those homes in seeking to do their homework to pass their examinations, and it causes more juvenile delinquency than any other evil in our land. I think that all Governments have a terrible responsibility for allowing this situation to arise. I would beg our Government to begin to deal with this problem with the same kind of dedication that is given by the nation in war time to providing the means of war. In peace time nothing is more necessary than that every family in our nation should have a roof over its head. I hope that the Government, as they approach this problem, will do so with the determination to remove what is the worst evil in our midst.

7.30 p.m.

LORD ERROLL OF HALE: My Lords, I think we can fairly say that this has been an extremely good and valuable debate, with contributions made from both sides of the Chamber displaying a knowledge, personal feeling and understanding of real needs, together also with a very real and practical approach. Of the many fine examples from my own side of the House, I was particularly impressed with the speech of my noble friend Lord Ilford, who has great knowledge and experience, and with others, as well. It is my first occasion since joining this House that I have had the privilege of hearing the Lord Chancellor on his feet. I must say, if he will not take it amiss, that it seemed to be rather a dull speech, almost reading a Departmental brief. If I may paraphrase the remarks of Mr. Brown, in Sheffield: "Scratch the Lord Chancellor and you find a politician underneath." As soon as he was interrupted, I was glad to find that in his noble office he was as much a politician as the rest of us.

The Report, which has had many remarks of good will and praise showered upon it, and deservedly so, stresses that

we should try to avoid prejudice—prejudice about the past, and Party prejudice as well. I think the avoidance of prejudice refers especially to the future, as well as to the past. This debate, if I may say so, has been distinguished by the almost complete avoidance of Party political prejudice. One thing which the Report itself stressed, and which some of us have perhaps strayed a little away from, is that it deals with London; and Sir Milner Holland was very careful to point out that whatever was said about London did not necessarily apply to other parts of the country. In any event, it is almost inevitable that noble Lords with personal experiences, such as the noble Lord, Lord Brockway, who has just sat down, would refer to their experiences as Members of Parliament for Eton and Slough and other constituencies. I am sure it is wrong to generalise from the Milner Holland Report into views about the housing situation of the country as a whole. Naturally, it was constructive and interesting to hear what the noble Baroness, Lady Gaitskell, had to say about Leeds and her own experiences in going around the country with her late husband.

I should like to remind your Lordships that the Report came to be written as the result of the initiative of the late Conservative Government. It was a Report initiated by my colleague Sir Keith Joseph, then Minister of Housing and Local Government, because he knew that what was required was a fresh assessment of the facts. After a Government have been in office for a number of years, it is only too easy for them, on the one hand, to assume that they know all the answers, or, on the other hand, to assume that they know nothing at all and that they must get outside advice. This I regard as an imaginative half-way house between those two extremes. My friend Sir Keith Joseph realised, with his great knowledge of the subject, that he did not know it all, and that it would be valuable to have a view from outside. Here we have, as a result, a most admirable Report, full of facts and proposals.

It deals decisively with what some have thought was the original offspring of the Report. It deals decisively with Rachmanism, which the Report shows to have been a relatively small matter confined to Rachman himself and to one or two others, by no means sparked off by the

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Rent Control Act, 1957, having started before then but having, by 1960, lost most of its disreputable profit motive. The Report also deals most decisively with the Rent Control Act, 1957, which really, as the Report shows, neither satisfied those who disbelieved in it nor satisfied those of us who thought it would provide a full answer to the housing shortage of London. The problems, as we have seen from the Report, arise—and this is perhaps worth stressing because it was not brought out by any of the noble Lords who spoke today—mainly from the prosperity of Britain and of London in particular.

A brief summary of the points which are referred to in the Report I think is worth giving again to your Lordships. The first is the great growth of employment in the London area. Then there is the division of the population of London into more numerous and smaller households (in itself a sign of prosperity); the growing numbers of old people who continue to maintain separate households (surely a direct product of the National Health Service and all the ancillary services which have done so much to prolong old age); and the additional demands caused by the very progress of slum clearance. Then there is the increasing competition for living space by those with increased wealth, and, finally, the natural demand for higher standards of housing in an era of rapid economic growth and rising prosperity.

The problem which is high-lighted in this Report would be nothing like so large if none of those six factors had been present. If we had had the old dying ten years younger; if we had had a declining standard of living; if we had had a high level of unemployment with, therefore, little money and little inducement to expand and improve oneself, the problem would not have been so serious. So the problems postulated in this Report arise largely because of the prosperity of Britain and of London in particular. Despite what has still to be done, I think it is worth while restating to your Lordships the solid and fine Conservative achievements over the last thirteen years, because although much remains to be done, a good deal has been done, and I think it is only right, in a complete absence of political prejudice,

to set a few of the facts on the record. Indeed, the Report itself shows how London's housing substantially improved under the Conservatives. Multi-occupation decreased by 44 per cent. between 1951 and 1961; overcrowding was down by 22 per cent.; the number of houses with exclusive use of all facilities was up from 52 per cent. to 62 per cent., and the net deficiency of dwellings was reduced from some 479,000 to about 247,000.

LORD SILKIN: My Lords, is the noble Lord claiming this as an achievement of the Government, or as an achievement of the Labour London County Council?

LORD ERROLL OF HALE: I am not claiming it as an achievement; I am saying what has happened during the period of Conservative Government, to show that a good deal of progress was made. That is my point, and I am quite prepared to give credit to the London County Council where credit is due to it; and I should naturally like noble Lords opposite to give credit to the Conservative Government where credit was due to us when we were in office.

Having restated our achievements and the progress made by the London County Council, as well as by the Conservative Government, in a climate in which they were enabled to make progress, I should like to refer—having once got the solitary snake out of the bath—to what the Report has to say about private landlords, because I do not think anybody expected the Milner Holland Report to come out so strongly in favour of the private landlords as it has done. I was sorry to see that Mr. Crossman said in another place:

“I have a natural prejudice against landlords”.—[OFFICIAL REPORT, Commons, Vol. 709 (No. 82), col. 72, March 22, 1965.]

That is an exact quotation, without snipping anything off either end to make it look different. Such a prejudice against landlords I thought was obviously shared, if I may say so, by the noble and learned Lord the Lord Chancellor in his own speech, and I was sorry, from what I had expected to be regarded as a judicial office, that prejudice should remain so violently in his mind, in the face of a Report by such an eminent Q.C. as Sir Milner Holland, who takes a very different view.

As it has not been referred to, I should like to quote briefly from the Report in respect of landlords. On page 151 the Milner Holland Report says:

"The great majority of tenants were either 'completely satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with the way the landlord had treated them, and the figures in the Table suggest that the 'most satisfied' tenants were those in furnished lettings and the least satisfied were those in controlled tenancies".

The landlord's side also shows a picture of fairly general satisfaction, and on page 161, where it summarises the position, the Report says:

"We are satisfied that most landlords discharge their responsibilities as fully as the rent yield from their property permits."

So let us have no more vendettas against landlords.

Then I think it is worth mentioning that not all tenants are angels and that there are bad tenants, too; and we must realise that some landlords are frustrated by the behaviour of bad tenants. On pages 181 to 186 of the Report it is worth seeing what the Committee have to say about tenants:

"Many notices to quit are given in order to get rid of tenants who are in arrears with rent or who are considered undesirable on other grounds. Although much of this Report is devoted to the problems of tenants, we do not wish to give the impression that there are no difficult or unsatisfactory tenants. We have had a number of cases reported to us in which it would be impossible for any reasonable person to avoid the conclusion that the tenant was thoroughly objectionable and the landlord fully justified in wanting to be rid of him."

This is summarised on page 186.

LORD SHEPHERD: So what?

LORD ERROLL OF HALE: The noble Lord opposite says "So what?". Just so that I hope there will be shown no prejudice against landlords or exceptional favour towards tenants. There are good and bad landlords and good and bad tenants. It is worth noticing that the worst cases of bad landlord-tenant relationships is usually where a landlord lives in his own home and lets off a room or two, and perhaps only shares the bathroom on an informal basis, which leads to friction among the families.

I think that one of the great things that the Committee have done is to set about the collecting and analysing of information on the problem of the

housing of the people of London. Much light has been thrown on a difficult matter. The first problem is to decide on what sort of information to collect. Straight away, what is a "household"? The noble Baroness, Lady Gaitskell, herself referred to young girls who rent a flat on their own. Are they a "household" or an "accommodation unit"? Where do they fit in? Where parents stay with their children are there to be considered two households living in one house?

What about the amenities? Is a bath an amenity? We have heard a great deal about baths this afternoon, and I think in this country we take it for granted that a bath within the accommodation unit is essential, but the Report on page 117 refers to the views of Londoners in the eighteenth century where it says:

"a bathroom was not included in a gentleman's house in those days. It was considered dangerous to wash".

But in the course of the last few months we have had the case of the up-to-date Canadian pre-fab houses imported into this country considered, if not sub-standard, not full standard because they were equipped with showers and not baths. We do not want to be too dogmatic about standards, so that we can have some fairly clear ideas.

We must realise that many Commonwealth immigrants are attracted here because living standards, bad though they seem to us, are vastly better than those they have left behind. If we are to consider Commonwealth immigrants and their life in this country, we must realise that in very many cases they prefer to live in large families sharing accommodation and certain communal facilities rather than be divided up into small accommodation units. That excellent novel *The House of Mr. Biswas*, the story of a wealthy Indian family living in Trinidad, shows us how entirely different was their concept of family living from anything we should regard as satisfactory in this country.

Information, while it must be collected, is going to be difficult to find and we have in all this to consider a remarkable pace of demographic change. The movements of people, as shown by this Report, are much more rapid than was perhaps

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fully understood. Therefore, any snapshot, however comprehensive, may well be out-of-date by the time it is fully developed and processed.

The right reverend Prelate the Lord Bishop of Southwark said in the course of a most interesting speech that control was no permanent answer. I hope I am not misquoting him, and I think he was probably referring more to physical controls on building and the like, though I naturally wondered whether in the use of the word "control" he was referring also to rent control. The right reverend Prelate shakes his head and I have my answer. No doubt in dealing with rent in the face of shortage, it seems reasonable to turn to control. But I believe that control is a doubtful palliative and certainly never a solution. The 1957 Act may not have succeeded because insufficient new and converted accommodation was brought forward to create a free market which alone could have made the 1957 Act a success—a free market in which all types of housing requirements could be satisfied in competition with other domestic needs and desires. The new rent control is bad because it will aggravate shortage and not help to alleviate it, by deterring would-be providers even more than before.

There is not time for me to develop the great question of security of tenure, so admirably outlined in the Report, but I think that in considering any question of rent control some regard should be had to the economic value of security of tenure and that lettings for a longer period ought to be at a higher price than lettings for shorter periods. In settling the levels of rent control the economic value of security of tenure should have a place in the minds, thoughts and calculations of those who will be settling the levels.

If the shortage is to be overcome all three agencies outlined in the Report must be given full scope: the local authorities, the housing associations—and my noble friend Lord Gage made a most interesting speech on housing associations—and, of course, private enterprise in the widest sense of the term. Furthermore, the Government will be depending essentially on private initiative, private companies, for repairs to existing houses and to houses still to

be built, for conversions and for new building. The Report states quite clearly that there is a tax bias against housing associations and private landlords. On page 227 it says clearly and unequivocally:

"We think that the taxation system of this country operates to discourage the provision of accommodation to let, and adversely affects the tenants of such property, particularly at the lower rent levels".

Without the help of private enterprise in its widest form the Government cannot succeed in their objective of providing the housing needs of the population of London.

As I said a moment ago, rent control only aggravates the problem because along with the new rent control we are now to have control on the resale of electricity. I do not think that, in order to stop up another loophole by control, it is worth the trouble that will be caused for every seaside landlady and nearly all hotels whose bedrooms will be affected. Next after this, surely, will have to come control of sub-tenancies in controlled premises. It will be very interesting to learn from the noble Lord who is to reply for the Government, whether controlled sub-tenancies in controlled premises will be the next essay in control upon which Her Majesty's Government will have to embark. Having controlled those sub-tenancies, the next step will undoubtedly have to be control of services provided by the landlord in controlled premises. We have been through all this before, from 1945 to 1951—more and more controls become necessary to deal with the situations which arise when control is imposed.

But there is a way out of this dilemma. There is a deficiency of under 250,000 houses. If these could be made available quickly local authorities would have sufficient elbow room to bulldoze the bad old areas, which some of them wish to do, as stated in the Report, and rebuild; and, with substantial rehousing, something like a free market in privately let houses and flats could be restored. It is not so impossible. The Woolwich scheme initiated by the last Government is for approximately 50,000 houses. So we need four more such schemes. Is the green belt so sacrosanct that we cannot make available a few of the less attractive tracts to provide for four more such schemes? I suggest giving one to the new Greater London Council; one should be shared

by the boroughs ; one for housing associations ; and one for private enterprise ; and let us see who would get their scheme going first. Let us have a little competition in this field between the various agencies designed to provide more houses. Whatever noble Lords feel, the fact remains that a combined effort is needed, as free from prejudice as possible. This debate has shown the cross-weave of good will which exists. It is for the Government to shape this fabric into a fine new garment.

7.52 p.m.

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Erroll of Hale, always presents the appearance of an angel, and on this occasion I was sorry to see his rapid descent out of heaven into some less salubrious place ; for indeed he began by exhorting us to avoid political prejudice and at intervals throughout his speech threw out a little aside for us to continue to do so, but he produced a speech which no doubt represents the policy of the Conservative Party but I cannot say I regarded it as coloured at any moment by anything but the most violent political prejudice. He meant to do it ; but we know him and we do not take it too seriously. But I must try to answer some of the questions put earlier in the debate, and I will try to do so as quickly as I can. If, at the end, I have omitted important questions which ought to have been answered, I will look through the debate afterwards and write to people, and if even that does not work no doubt they will write and remind me that I have not answered the pertinent question about whatever it was.

May I begin by joining all noble Lords who have spoken in this debate in praise of an excellent Report, which only lacked an index, but which contained a mass of material and sorted it. That was the contribution it seemed to me to make. In addition to that, the Report was prepared under continual pressure of time. The noble Lord, Lord Erroll of Hale, pointed out that it was asked for by a Conservative Government. So it was, and I can tell him why. It was asked for because there was a very loud outcry at the time about the state of London housing, aggravated I agree by some instances about Rachman and others, but substantially the complaint

was that the Government for thirteen years past had really done nothing about the situation. I do not say people were right or wrong ; for this purpose that does not matter. But there was that outcry, and there was an Election coming ; there were political matters concerning the Greater London Council and the Greater London boroughs, and it was high time to hide behind something. That was the moment the Government chose to try to get the facts from the Milner Holland Report. That they succeeded so well in getting the facts is no credit to them, but is a great deal of credit to the Milner Holland Committee and the Report they produced.

I think this is really the moment to find, if I can discover it again, the really classic passage about London housing. This arose on the Second Reading debate of what is now the 1957 Rent Act. The hero of the occasion was Mr. Enoch Powell. I do not for one moment wish to prejudice Mr. Enoch Powell's undoubted chances of succeeding to the leadership of the Conservative Party, and I hope nothing I say about him will be held to have any effect on that, but he made a speech which to look upon is really rather interesting. He talked at large about housing in general and he came at a particular point on to London housing. I said at the time (I do not like people who quote their own questions many years afterwards, but still, I did happen to do it, and so I must):

"I have restrained myself with great difficulty from interrupting before and I am obliged to the honourable Gentleman for giving way. I want to ask only one question. Does he, or does he not, say that the demand for houses in London will have been met by the end of 1957?"—[OFFICIAL REPORT (Commons) Vol. 560, col. 770, November 21, 1956.]

Looking back at the question, I should have thought it was fairly easy to answer. I do not know what he intended to say, but this is the remark that has rung down the "corridors of power" whenever we have a debate about housing:

"Undoubtedly there are areas of the country where the balance of supply and demand is different from that in other areas. In London there is a special situation, but the Government see no reason to doubt that the rents which it will be possible to obtain for this large number of rented houses coming on to the market at the same time will be not much in excess of the rents which will be permissible under the rest of the Bill for the houses remaining in control." [*Ibid.*]

[Lord Mitchison.]

That was not the case. Decontrolled rents went up two or three times at least, and of course the large number of houses he referred to was in fact a very small proportion of the decontrolled houses, for what is now classed as creeping decontrol has done far more damage to the keeping of London rents to the level that ordinary folk could pay than anything that was done by way of change with reference to rating valuation.

This is a complex matter, and I think that the right way to tackle it is first of all to try to answer some specific questions. First, may I respectfully congratulate my noble friend, Lord Silkin, not only on initiating the debate but on the contents, form and everything else in the speech he made in doing so? And, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, may I here and now extend exactly the same congratulations to my noble and learned friend the Lord Chancellor on the admirable speech he made. I do not quite know why noble Lords opposite sought to make some distinction. They were both very good speeches, I thought; I do not know which was the better and I feel humble towards both of them.

My noble friend Lord Silkin asked about the possibility of local authorities working together in the matter of pooling their building programmes or the execution of their building programmes, forming working consortia, possibly buying together, and so on. This is a very timeous question. This matter is, in fact, under active consideration. There has recently been a conference of local authorities to examine this particular question, under the chairmanship of the Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and some progress has already been made.

If I leave my noble friend, it is to try to answer as much as I can of what the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, put to me. I must, by the way, correct him on one point. He was under the impression, I think, that the housing shortage had diminished in London in the last two or three years. That is not so. If he will look at page 99 of the Report he will find this:

“The Ministry”—

after examining certain things—

“concluded that the housing shortage in London had grown worse since 1961—from about 185,000 in 1961 to perhaps as much as 230,000 by 1964.”

They give the reasons:

“... first, the rate at which new dwellings are being provided appears to have slackened, continuing a trend already established during the late 1950s. Secondly, the effects of the reduced supply are being aggravated by an accelerated growth in the number of households.”

When one turns to what has happened about new dwellings, one finds in London the same sort of picture as in the country at large; a slow drop in the total number and a rapid drop in the houses built by public authorities, with an increase in the houses built by private enterprise—and those, as this Report makes abundantly clear, built for sale and not for letting. That, of course, was the policy of the outgoing Administration and the Governments which preceded it. It was part of their way of dealing with the housing shortage to see that ample encouragement in every form was given to those who wished to build houses for sale, and therefore to provide for people who were able to buy their own houses, or were able to do so with the assistance of a building society. But they reduced in London, as elsewhere—the process was not quite continuous, but it was a steady decrease—the number of houses built by public authorities. They did so in various ways, one of which was the high rate of interest charged to local authorities under Tory financial administration, a matter which, as we have abundantly indicated, we propose to put right as soon as we can. If we cannot do it sooner, this is not our fault.

Let us remember the debts to the rest of the world with which we were left by the outgoing Administration, and let us remember the condition of the country after thirteen years of a Government which was not going anywhere in particular, and indeed did not know where it was going except backwards. That, as I see it, is the point about the shortage diminishing. By the way, the figure of 4.53 per cent. is, of course, perfectly correct for what it was, and the reasons for it were given in the Milner Holland Report; indeed, I rather think that they were quoted by my noble and learned friend the Lord Chancellor, in the course of his speech. One important reason

is the fact that all the local authorities, with the single and significant exception of New Towns and other such developments, are able to draw on a pool of houses, so that, if they level out their rents and their borrowings, the net rate of borrowing will be lower than it would be on present figures.

Then we were asked about increasing the densities, how this was and should be done, and who should do it—and I think that was suggested, too. This seems to me to be a matter for the Development Plan for London, which is a general development plan for the whole of London, and is the business of the Greater London Council under the recent Act of 1963.

A question was asked about residential qualifications. Residential qualifications seem to me to be a rather difficult matter, because, as I see it, it is necessary to keep a balance between two things and this has never been easy. On the one hand, if you insist on absolute uniformity, it means depriving local authorities of the freedom that I think they ought to have to adapt what they are doing, in this case in connection with the housing programme, to the local requirements. They are, on the whole, the best judges, and, I may add, the elected judges. Therefore, I think that complete uniformity is going too far.

But I must say that the differences at present are rather startling. We were told, for instance, that there was usually—as indeed is the fact—a residential qualification. If I may give instances, in Edmonton it is ten years; in Enfield five years, and in Southgate one year; and there are similar variations in other parts of the country. This involves difficult questions. For instance, moving from one borough to another may entail some unfortunate consequences, since a man does not carry his residential qualifications with him. But again, I think this is a matter that will have to be discussed, and will be discussed, with the local authorities themselves. I do not think one can say here and now that they must keep an absolute uniformity. Councils can merely try to make the scheme work, having regard to their proper function as an elected authority and to the fact that they are the best judges of their own local conditions.

I turn from that to another matter raised by the noble Lord, Lord Hastings—namely, densities. Again, it was suggested that they ought to be reviewed. I quite see the point. I see the force of the photographs that appear in the Report. No doubt it is a matter that has to be considered from time to time; but this again, as I have said, seems to be something which, at any rate in the first instance, is the business of the Greater London Council and, I may add, of the new London boroughs. Relations between the Greater London Council and the London boroughs must be just as good as we can make them. Quite frankly, as we all know, there were occasional difficulties between the London County Council and the metropolitan boroughs. We do not want that situation repeated. We want complete co-operation. But I think that this is a matter that the Greater London Council will have to consider.

It is not, I think, correct to say that the decisions on housing made by the Greater London Council can be made only with the concurrence both of the London borough and of the Ministry. I will not take up time by quoting the Act, but I think it will be found that the concurrence of either of those two bodies is sufficient; it does not require the concurrence of both.

LORD HASTINGS: My Lords, I think that is what I said.

LORD MITCHISON: I see. Then I am glad. I misunderstood. I thought the noble Lord was saying that it required the concurrence of both parties. But only one need agree. That seems to me a reasonable arrangement.

The noble Lord, Lord Amulree, talked about housing associations. So did the noble Viscount, Lord Gage, and so, with reference to their inability to draw on pools, did the noble Viscount, Lord Colville of Culross. But it is not by any means an absolute inability. The position is that where an association are unsubsidised, they can do what they like. They have to frame their own objects in their own way. It is when associations are subsidised that difficulty arises. In such cases, they must apply to the Minister to make a scheme in order to pool the management of all the houses they are putting up. They have to consult

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the relevant local authorities, and perhaps the result of that has been that the power has been little used. I can only say to noble Lords who are interested in the matter that I see the force of the point, and that it is quite clear from what happened in another place, and indeed from what has been said to-day, that my right honourable friend the Minister desires to make what use he properly can of housing associations, and to encourage them. And no doubt that point will be considered.

As regards the progress of the Housing Corporation, about which the noble Lord, Lord Hastings asked me, I would remind your Lordships that it came into being only in January of this year. There were instruments issued for four schemes, and there are twenty-four in the pipe-line, so to speak, of which five are in the Greater London area. So it is a recent body but not an inactive one.

LORD HASTINGS: My Lords, is there in fact any difficulty about getting money from the building societies, as the noble Lord, Lord Silkin suggested.

LORD MITCHISON: I am afraid that I do not know, offhand, the answer to that question. I will try to find out, if the noble Lord is interested, and see what the position is.

The right reverend Prelate the Lord Bishop of Southwark asked what steps could be taken to ensure that the building resources of the country were directed to what is necessary. The Government have no present intention of reintroducing building controls, but we believe that the planning machinery can be used broadly for that purpose. Perhaps I may leave it at that for the moment. But that is the general intention.

The noble Lord, Lord Ilford, made the statement that no comprehensive solution could be found without the full use of private landlords. I wonder whether the noble Lord could help me. Was there a question which turned on that? I did not understand what was intended. If he was asking me nothing then I will leave it.

LORD ILFORD: My Lords that was a statement of fact, though I did address a question to the noble Lord later on in my speech.

LORD MITCHISON: That is the note I have taken so far: I cannot find any other question asked by the noble Lord, Lord Ilford. If he cares to remind me now, I will try to answer him. If he does not, I will go on to something else.

LORD ILFORD: My Lords, I asked the noble Lord whether Her Majesty's Government would take advantage of the contribution that private enterprise could make, as was pointed out in so many passages of the Milner Holland Report.

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, I propose to deal with that matter later. It seems to me that, looking at this Report—which is what we are looking at to-day and not, incidentally, the Rent Bill (I say that for the information of the noble Lord, Lord Erroll of Hale)—there are two things which are perfectly clear. The first is that, whatever may have happened in the past, the London housing situation at the moment is very grave indeed. The extent of the shortage to which I referred just now, the fact that multi-occupation is not only very extensive but spreading, entailing the most disastrous and dangerous social consequences, and the further fact that, notwithstanding multi-occupation (which is the worst possible way of trying to solve the problem), there are still a considerable number of families without anywhere to go with the result that they have to be looked after by the welfare services, all emerge from this Report. We are bound to take these facts seriously. This state of affairs is a real scandal. The fact that it may or may not have been worse in the past does not make it any less a scandal, does not make it any less a responsibility on the present Government, as it was the responsibility of the outgoing Government, to do what we can about it.

One of the major questions which arises from the Report is what agencies we should use, and to what extent. There are three possible agencies. I have spoken already about housing associations, but I do not think that, from the nature of what they do, they can make a very large contribution to the real hard core of the problem, which is finding for the labourer, the man with a low income, somewhere to live in London. That is the problem. While no doubt there are other needs to be satisfied, and

housing associations can make some contribution, they are not sufficiently widespread in their operations, and what they do is not important enough, for them to be considered as an alternative to one or other of the remaining two agencies.

Let us look at the position of private landlords. There are a very large number of houses at present owned by private landlords and let out to individuals. They fall broadly into two classes. One class are houses or flats which provide for people who are relatively well off. There is not much difficulty about those; they are not mentioned in the Report. If you pay enough you can get somewhere to live by taking one of those houses or flats. But as to the real nub of the problem—what you are to provide for the man with the small income—private landlordism has failed, as I see it, completely. I see no reason to think that it will succeed any better in coping with the problem before us.

It has failed in a number of ways. It has failed partly—and the private landlords have not as a group been exceptionally wicked; I have never suggested that, here or anywhere else—because the landlords have been in a position which gives them, on the one hand, a very great measure of power over the occupiers of their houses, but, on the other hand, a very difficult role to carry out from the point of view of their own advantage. The result is that over years and years, the tenants are quite ready to admit in the majority of cases, as the Report found, the landlords try to do something but they do not succeed in doing it. They have this bad property, as is perfectly clear—and this is known to all of us, quite apart from the Report—all over London, and they have not given their tenants security of tenure.

I repeat, for the third time, and I will go on saying it, that I am not suggesting they are exceptionally wicked people. It is a question of the position into which they have been put in the middle of an extremely complex problem. When one has people in that position it is, on the face of it, extremely unlikely that they are going to be the best agency to use in order to improve the situation. They represent at present the very worst side of it. That is the present state of affairs, as I see it.

LORD HASTINGS: My Lords, is the noble Lord referring to the provision of new housing or to the adequate maintenance of existing houses? This is a very important distinction.

LORD MITCHISON: I am referring at the moment to the improvement of the general position, and I should regard both of those things as part of it. What I was saying was directed particularly to the provision of new housing. What I am now going to say applies to both. It may be said that they have never really had a fair chance. I do not accept that. I think that they have had the chance and that, in the economic world in which we live, that was what they were entitled to, no more and no less. If somebody is going to be helped in any way out of public funds, whether it be by taxation or in any other way, I am not sure that I would select those people as suitable candidates for the purpose—indeed, I would not. If what we are considering is the real improvement of London housing, I would put whatever assistance was available to the credit of the local authorities and to the housing associations rather than to the private landlords.

That seems to me the inevitable conclusion that comes out of this Report, unless you except one curious half suggestion, towards the end of the Report, that something might be done by way of subsidising private landlords. I looked at it carefully, I read it through two or three times, and it was a quite minor suggestion. The substance of the matter is that if one is going to deal effectively with the London housing situation one has to attack the problems with a vigour which the last Government failed entirely to show, and one has to do this mainly through the local authorities. They are the only people who are in a position to deal with it, once you accept the conclusion which emerges from the Report that the people hardest hit are the people at the bottom of the income scale.

LORD ILFORD: My Lords, may I ask the noble Lord whether what he is saying now means that Her Majesty's Government do not propose to adopt any of the proposals which the Report contains, for enabling the private landlords to make their contribution to the solution?

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, had I meant that, I should have said so. What I did say—which, incidentally, was what my noble and learned friend the Lord Chancellor also said—was that my right honourable friend the Minister of Housing and Local Government rejects the idea of a subsidy to private landlords; and I cannot myself see what possible reason there can be for such a subsidy.

VISCOUNT COLVILLE OF CULROSS: My Lords, I think the noble Lord has got past me in his notes, and I have no doubt that he has lost the appropriate piece of paper. But I asked him whether he could clear up the difficulty which I foresaw about the fact that two-thirds (I think it was: I cannot remember the figures) of the tenants could not afford even the lowest provision of housing by the local authorities when it was a large house, and one-half could not afford the other sort. How, then, is he going to deal with the situation which is at the moment dealt with by the private landlords, if he is going to deal with it solely in future through the local authorities?

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, I think this is a case for a little horse-sense. We must have new houses; they must be let, and they must be let at a rent which the ordinary labourer, the working man, the man in a low income group coming into London, can afford to pay. On that, I should have thought, we are all agreed. If that is the position, and if we are going to help anybody to build those houses, then it is much better to help the agency which has the minimum of difficulties. This, incidentally, was the passage which the noble Viscount quoted about new houses, and I think he would find the situation a little different if he expanded the figure somewhat. But I do not want to go into that: I want to take the question quite broadly. If we must house these people, and house them in rented houses, then the right way to do it is through the local authorities. That is really the conclusion. I have very great respect for the noble Viscount—I think he does his own thinking about these things—and, if the question is as I have stated it, I do not see how one can avoid that conclusion in the present circumstances.

VISCOUNT COLVILLE OF CULROSS: My Lords, I am very much obliged to the noble Lord. He presumably means that the whole subsidy situation for the houses that are now going to be provided will have to be reviewed, and a very much greater subsidy produced for the local authorities.

LORD MITCHISON: I was going to talk about this, but I must not take too long because it is getting monstrously late. But it seems to me that housing subsidies must be considered as part of the general relations between local government and the central Government. There are other things that come into it—teachers' salaries and things of that sort, too. But I do not shrink from the conclusion that more subsidies may have to be given. But the case for them will have to be proved, and it will have to be examined and so forth. All I am concerned with in the debate on this Report is which of the three agencies I have mentioned is the right one, and I feel no doubt about the answer.

I want to end with one other point. This is, indeed, as several noble Lords have said, a complex situation. The difficulties are complex and the position arises from all kinds of factors, such as the complicated things which make up the civilisation and society in which we live. I think a problem of the sort has existed for a very long time in London; and it is quite true, as one right reverend Prelate said, that recent developments have made it more complicated. But when you come down to the end of it, it seems to me that there is one real point, which is not ideological prejudice, but possibly a deep difference between the two sides of the House. I do not accuse noble Lords opposite of saying that the rights of property ought always to prevail; that the investor must at all costs be safeguarded. That is going much too far. But I think they have a preference for the landlords' interests—and legitimate interests under the law as it is—as against the hardship which may be caused to a tenant.

On this side of the House we feel, without hesitation, that the crying thing in London at present is the personal misery and hardship that is caused to thousands and thousands of people, the old and the middle-aged, the young, all kinds of folk

—people whom it is our bounden duty as a Parliament to help all we can. We feel that this overrides everything else in these considerations, and that if the forms that are adopted—the subsidies, the local authorities, the housing associations, whatever it is—are insufficient to deal with the situation, then they must be made sufficient to do so. It is a crying thing in this age of ours and in this city of ours. I am a Londoner, I have spent most of my life in London, and I feel a great pride in London. But, my goodness, so long as the housing situation is as it is now, I cannot feel any pride at what is happening to so many of my fellow citizens!

LORD WOLVERTON: My Lords, before the noble Lord finishes, may I point out that I asked a number of questions about subsidies? I said that I thought the subsidy for local authorities in London and other big cities—though to-night we are talking only about London—would have to be increased to get the building done. Also, I begged the Government to consider, as was said in the Milner Holland Report, bringing in all agencies. One of the difficulties that private enterprise has had—and the companies come out well in the Report—is that building costs have risen so much that, as I said in my speech, without subsidies I cannot see how they can do much. Can the noble Lord answer the question?

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, I am sorry that I did not answer the noble Lord. I did my best to answer most of the questions. I heard what he said about Holland, and found it very interesting.

LORD WOLVERTON: My Lords, I referred to Sweden. Sweden is a Socialist-controlled country.

LORD MITCHISON: There is something of the sort in Holland, too. But be that as it may. I do not think one can put a figure on what is a reasonable subsidy and say, "It ought to be increased by so much". I think one has simply to say, "This is the way in which it ought to be done." Clearly, an increase in subsidies is not ruled out; but, equally clearly, it cannot be demonstrated, and is not demonstrated, in the course of a debate like this.

As my last but one point, I would remind your Lordships that this is the season of the year in which one says

very little about public funds; and this is, after all, something to do with public funds. I am not saying that it is technically the Chancellor of the Exchequer's business, but it is clearly concerned with the Budget as a whole. Lastly, I would say that I am sorry that the noble Lord finds that the cost of building goes up so much. It is perfectly true that the cost of building has gone up, but in most cases another factor has made housing more expensive; and that is the fantastic increase in land prices.

LORD HASTINGS: My Lords, I am sorry to interrupt again at the end of the noble Lord's speech, but I think it essential that we clear up this question. The noble Lord keeps referring to subsidies. I never mentioned subsidies in my speech. I was dealing with tax rebates—indirect subsidy of a form, but only to the level already enjoyed by owner-occupiers and the tenants of local authorities. Does the noble Lord really mean that the 1,250,000 houses in London (I believe that is the figure) which are privately rented can become decent accommodation through the sole agency of the operations of a local authority? That is the whole point, and I want to know if the noble Lord, or the Government he represents, is definitely turning down any idea of tax rebates for privately rented property in that particular field. How can he claim that it is solely for the local authority to put the matter right?

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, I am sorry if I did not answer the noble Lord. I think the answer is painfully obvious. Budget Day is to be on April 6, and tax rebates are entirely a question for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Obviously, by convention, he would not say anything about this now, and, even more obviously, it is something which I can say nothing about now. I would merely say that I thought some of the suggestions about tax rebates were (shall we say?) on the hopeful side.

THE LORD BISHOP OF SOUTHWARK: My Lords, would it be possible for the noble Lord to answer the question which I asked with regard to whether or not the Government were seeking to encourage industrialised building techniques?

LORD MITCHISON: My Lords, I am sorry that was another one which I forgot. The answer is, Yes. The right

[Lord Mitchison.]

reverend Prelate will find that my right honourable friend the Minister of Public Building and Works has made one or two statements about the matter in another place. I will try to obtain the references for the right reverend Prelate, if he would like them.

8.30 p.m.

LORD SILKIN: My Lords, I am sure those of your Lordships who are still left here will agree with me that it has been a well worth while debate. We have had a conflict of views, but, of course, that is what we are here for. We are not here to agree with one another: we are here to express our views, and to express them freely, frankly and, I hope, honestly and objectively; and perhaps we may learn from one another's point of view and be able to shift one another. At this late hour I do not want to develop this or any other points, but there are just three things I want to say. One is that I hope my noble friend Lord Mitchison did not mean to imply that we on this side are against owner-occupiers. We are not.

LORD MITCHISON: No.

LORD SILKIN: It is, of course, a question of priority, and in London at this moment there is a greater need for dealing with the problem of houses to let, and particularly low-rented houses, than there is for dealing with the problem of providing houses for owner-occupiers. But we are in general agreement here. We have agreed to provide mortgages for owner-occupiers, and I hope we shall continue to do so.

My noble friend did not, I thought, give sufficient credit to the possibilities of housing associations. He thought they had not got a large contribution to make. I think they have. I believe that, if they are properly assisted, they have a tremendous contribution to make and that there is a tremendous need for them. We have stressed this afternoon and this evening the needs of the lowest-

paid workers, and I agree that they are very great indeed; but there is equal hardship among the lower-middle-class, who, equally, cannot find accommodation at rents they can afford to pay—and it is this class which the housing associations are designed to help. I hope that this Government will give every possible assistance to them, will encourage them and will believe that they really have an important and large contribution to make.

In this connection, I asked whether my noble friend could say—and I am not surprised that he is not able to do so—what is the assistance which the building societies have been able to give. I was afraid they had rather let us down so far. We had assumed that they were going to provide two-thirds of the finance. It appears from my own experience that they have not; but perhaps the noble Lord could tell us—could tell me, at any rate—when he has made inquiries, what is the position of the building societies. I shall then pass the information on to the noble Lord, Lord Hastings, as he was so sure that it was all right.

My Lords, I do not want to prolong this discussion. Once again, I should like to express my own thanks to all who have taken part in the debate for their valuable contributions. I now beg leave to withdraw my Motion.

Motions for Papers, by leave, withdrawn.

CRUDE OIL TERMINALS (HUMBER) BILL [H.L.]

THE CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES informed the House that the opposition to the Bill was withdrawn. The Order made on the 23rd instant discharged, and Bill committed to the Committee on Unopposed Bills.

House adjourned at twenty-seven minutes before nine o'clock.