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# WOMEN'S VILLAGE COUNCILS FEDERATION



## STATE-AIDED HOUSING AFTER THE WAR

### MEN

*Operating Causes for the Demand, with Necessity for  
Immediate Action:*

- (1) Our debt of gratitude to those men who have fought for freedom, and who, on returning, will have the right to good homes. The Local Government Board, through the County Councils and Rural District Councils, urge that local schemes for State-aided Housing should be formulated. It is believed that the response is only partial, great indifference still prevails in many rural districts. Overpowering distress is anticipated after the war unless large measures be taken to provide employment. Men in agriculture and building trade classes will be the first to be released on demobilisation.
- (2) In the Army rural labourers are having more consideration than ever before. They are being better fed, clothed, and catered for, and provided with clubs and social amusements. They are trained to the use of arms and organised warfare, and to be resourceful. The reaction to Peace and Civil Liberty holds great danger when it is remembered that millions of fighting men, in the prime of life, will be returning to difficult economic conditions, and to a shortage of homes. Whether a peaceful revolution or otherwise will follow must largely depend on an immediate realisation of these disturbing factors by those at home.

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## WOMEN

Homes are of women's making, and no success can be expected from any scheme which leaves the Mother out of sight.

Generally speaking, she has been hitherto almost hopelessly crippled by bad or unsuitable conditions. Economic stress is strongest at the time when she is least able to bear it. The Insurance Act brought to light dreadful statistics of ill-health, now seen to be largely due to unfavourable conditions. Miss Ashton has spoken truly of Motherhood as "a sweated industry."

Unlike her town sister, the rural woman sees nothing better, and is unable to realise, and demand some share in, the vast improvement in sanitary arrangements, lighting, water supply, house-planning, and labour-saving appliances. The ceaseless round of toil which results affects both body and mind, chances of development are checked, the vicious circle remains unbroken. To this is added a strange sense of fear which permeates rural districts; fear of loss of employment, or of custom, or of small charitable benefits is very strong, and sometimes, alas! is well founded, and answerable for much of the stagnation of thought, and inertia, which baffle the would-be reformer. Class divisions also discourage initiative. But deep in the women's heart is the longing for betterment for their children, often evinced by the sacrifices they make to give them a start in life, away from the old home and limitations.

## CHILDREN

The majority of rural children grow up under a bad housing system, most villages need complete overhauling. Custom has deadened both landlord and tenant to abuses; shortage of houses has compelled acceptance of perfectly detestable conditions, ruinous alike to soul and body. Good "tied" cottages exist for certain classes of employment, but are insufficient in number, and they may be far from Church, schools, and shops.

"Close to stable" often appears in advertisements for farm labourers by tenant farmers. Extension in villages has generally been left to speculative builders, with results disastrous to health and beauty.

Where land for building is unattainable overcrowding or desertion to cities follows; gardens may be insufficient, allotments far from the home, Village Halls for instruction and amusement non-existent.

A child determines at an early age to get away from these limitations, and the deadly mental and social dulness. While infant life pays a heavy toll to insanitary surroundings, Maternity Welfare work, where found, suffers such wastage that half its value is lost.

## AIMS OF WOMEN'S VILLAGE COUNCILS

### *The Councils are formed to meet these Conditions*

We wish to write with reserve of a comparatively recent effort. Our aim is to work scientifically to find the best methods, and we must not cripple early attempts by too decisive statements, which might hamper evolution. So far the results are encouraging, we find an emphatic response and demand. Our objective is the development of mind and character in the rural working woman, through her interest in her home, and her husband's and children's welfare, in connection with Housing, Maternity, and Infant Welfare, and Education in its full sense.

In Findon, Sussex, a masterly analysis of the local housing conditions prepared by the vicar, the Rev. W. D. Allen, enabled a beginning to be made.

The President, herself a working woman, assures us that the "best" women have joined the Women's Village Council. We rely solely on the opinion formed by them for the avoidance of undesirable elements.

Neighbourliness is encouraged, and a fair temper asked for in discussions. The first W.V.C. formed in Findon is shaping well, and augurs success for others in process of formation. The usual procedure of public meetings is being learnt, and all important matters are voted upon. Resolutions sent to the County Council, Rural District Council, and Parish Council have been treated with a respect not accorded to the complaints of members as private individuals.

Gifts of papers and pamphlets on social subjects are being circulated in order that accurate information may supersede vague ideas.

The visitation of members' cottages has begun, with the aid of a form of inquiry prepared by a London Surveyor, Mr. Henry Chapman, whose help and interest have been of great service. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. J. J. Mallon, Secretary of the Anti-Sweating League, for a gift of literature, and his encouragement of this effort for village development, and to Mr. Henry Aldridge, Secretary, National Housing and Town-Planning Council, for his kind welcome to the W.V.C. scheme.

From the experience already gathered it is evident that the number of State-aided houses which will be required after the war has been under-estimated. The Scottish Housing Commission announces their objective as follows: "A healthy family in a family home."

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It is the aspiration of the W.V.C.'s to assist in the same good work in England. While glad to co-operate with any society working for betterment, we desire to remain independent, and, in the sense of *party* politics, non-political, and to work by democratic methods in an orderly progressive manner. We are undenominational, but desire full recognition of the claims of the spiritual life.

The Women's Village Councils are united in a Federation in order that the objects of our work and the form of organisation may be maintained. Scope is given to enterprise and adaptability to local conditions, while power is gained by co-operation and the interchange of new ideas.

In the conjunction of character-building and cottage-building we hope for worthy homes for the new generation, and for those men and women who are suffering so deeply to-day.

We have chosen for our Watchword of hope and inspiration the words of Blake:

"Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land."

WOMEN'S VILLAGE COUNCILS FEDERATION.

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