

Extract from a speech by Mr. George Hicks, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, M.O.W.B., at a luncheon of the Town and Country Planning Association, on "The Part of the Ministry of Works in Post War Reconstruction", at lunch-time today:

"We, at the Ministry of Works, are working for an age when the questions in what kind of town, in what kind of street and in what kind of houses the nation shall find its home, is settled less by blind haphazard processes and more by what our people collectively think is right.

"To bring about this change there must be a great deal of collective action and control. For some time after the war our resources for building are bound to fall short of demand and so, if the Ministry is asked to continue some measure of control, its object would be to see that building resources are fairly and equally available to all, and to each according to his need.

"At the present moment the Ministry of Works is strengthening building technique by making it simpler, quicker and more efficient in its application to wartime needs. We have done a good deal of standardisation - a word which covers at least three different things. First, the standard specification of materials which is a question of agreeing a physical or chemical description that will give the material certain fixed properties on which the user can rely. This work, the work of the British Standards Institution, goes on in peace time and wartime and is the basis of sane design and economic building. Then there is simplification, the reduction of sizes, shapes and varieties to a few. And finally there is standardised planning of such buildings as canteens and hostels

"There is an enormous discrepancy between what is known and what is done in building as we see it in our streets and in our houses. Ask yourself what is to be found in any ordinary building - be it a State-aided council house, a good speculative builder's house, a block of flats or an office block or a factory - of all the thinking and experimenting in building matters that has been going on in workshops and drawing offices and laboratories in all the great countries of the world.

"I think the answer will be disappointing. A mass of priceless knowledge lies scattered in many places. We are making it our business to see that it is all collected and prepared in convenient form which can be digested by the people who do the work of building. Our intention is to stimulate the various interests most vitally concerned to do the work, and we will co-ordinate and assist.

"The coming of peace will bring tremendous difficulties - and a tremendous opportunity for the building industry to take a forward step. For years many of us have felt that if only the great machine of modern industry could be stopped all sorts of valuable improvements might be made. In a sense the war has stopped it. We are going over the great machine of peacetime building to see what can be done to improve it.

"It used to be an old gag that Governments could never afford to think about the future because the future has no votes. If that was ever true it is not true today. In this, the greatest and hardest of all our wars, our vision of the future is the one thing that sustains us."