

it indulges in rent control and various easy home-purchase subsidies. The object is to help the needy, the returning veterans, the families of defense workers, the "underpaid public servants," all those who are thought to be worthy and deserving. And it is not a popular thing to question such humanitarian motives. However, it is necessary to raise some questions because the means employed are defeating the objective. The housing shortage persists because of what is being done by the government in its effort to correct it. And the victims who suffer most are the very ones who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of this intervention—the persons who were presumed to be unable to meet their own need for housing. Even an artificially created shortage hits first and hardest against those least able to afford the scarce item.

The government is trying to prohibit competitive bargaining as the determinant of the price for housing. In other words, the government has been trying to force people to do what they would not do voluntarily. In one sense, it may be said that the housing shortage is merely a measure of popular resistance to the idea of substituting the force of government for the voluntary market method of bringing supply and demand toward a balance. Shortages and surpluses do not develop or, at least, do not continue for long when prices are free

to fluctuate according to the choices of buyers and sellers.

Measuring the Shortage

THE CURRENT HOUSING "shortage" is not a thing that can be measured merely by comparing the number of families or the number of people with the number of dwellings or the number of rooms. The 1950 census reports an average of 3.5 persons per occupied dwelling unit in the United States, compared with 3.7 persons at the end of World War II, 3.8 persons in 1940, and 4.8 persons in 1900. The total number of dwelling units in 1950 was 23 per cent greater than in 1940, whereas the same period saw a population increase of less than 15 per cent. These figures certainly indicate that most of the so-called housing shortage stems from disruption of the market mechanism rather than from a decline in dwelling facilities.

Such a comparison of persons per dwelling, of course, tells nothing specific about the condition of the dwellings or the happiness or health of the residents. It has been charged that some Americans are now forced to live in slums and substandard dwellings. And it undoubtedly is true that some Americans are living in homes which other Americans would classify as uninhabitable.