

The Migrants' Greatest Need Is Housing

By **STANLEY BAILEY**

Approximately 150 rural tenements—shack towns or slums—have grown up in California, generally near agricultural cities and towns, according to Carey McWilliams, chief of the State Division of Immigration and Housing.

They are occupied by untold thousands of people.

The rural housing problem is vastly broader than the farm labor problem and the housing of agricultural workers, McWilliams said.

Many of the former migratory agricultural workers—refugees from the dust bowl—have ceased to migrate and many have ceased to be agricultural workers, looking to the towns and cities for their small incomes.

The abnormal increase of population resulting from the dust bowl exodus has created a serious house shortage problem.

In preceding articles of this series, the results of that shortage and the makeshift houses erected by the refugees have been detailed.

RELIEF CHECKS PAY RENT

Many of the camps are supported by rentals paid private operators from relief checks.

SRA or other agencies, McWilliams said, as we made a tour of many of the slums, have no alternative, for there is no other place that the clients can be housed.

"There is not a town in the San Joaquin valley," he said, "where there is not a housing shortage from the highest to the lowest income groups."

Holding that the first step toward any kind of an answer can be taken only after a real survey has been made, McWilliams recently called a conference of State and Federal representatives and officials of the State Chamber of Commerce and the Associated Farmers, who inaugurated plans for a WPA survey.

McWilliams believes the plan of Governor Olson for a State Housing Authority would be a great step forward.

The authority would qualify for loans under the United States Housing Authority on a State-wide basis, and the plan would not interfere with any city or county that already may have taken the initiative, the official said.

It would be impossible, he added,



CAREY McWILLIAMS

Finds valley short of homes

to attempt to provide permanent housing for all the refugees in the San Joaquin valley, and projects could be undertaken only in certain strategic localities.

He suggested construction on a basis of about 20,000, to eliminate the worst conditions we had seen on our trip.

"No matter how conditions may change," McWilliams said, "there will still be need for this program."

The construction, he said, would take care of only a part of those people who are now in the State—and he cited that fact as his answer to the fear that attempts to alleviate the condition of those who are now here would serve as invitations for additional hordes of migrants to come.

WOULD PRODUCE FOR SELVES

Subsistence farming would be necessary in connection with each project, he said, and unemployed would work the farms, not to produce for sale, but for the occupants. Work could be rotated and credit given such workers for rent.

Two such projects have been put into operation in Texas, McWilliams continued, and rent is \$6.50 a month. He estimated the figure could be as low as low or lower in California—whereas the SRA rent now averages higher than that figure.

Whatever the solution, whatever is done, there is a unanimity of opinion among all students of the problem that the solution of that and the kindred problem of migration into California must be sought by the Federal Government.