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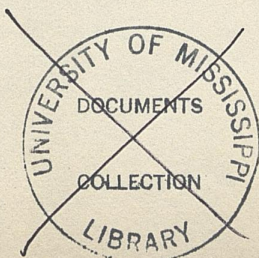
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RELEASE NO. 386

The attached address will be made by Nathan Straus, Administrator of the United States Housing Authority, in the Swedish Pavilion at the World's Fair in New York on Tuesday night, Sept. 19. The occasion is a dinner under the auspices of the National Public Housing Conference.

For release to A. M. papers of Wednesday, Sept. 20, and thereafter.

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To treat the subject of tonight's meeting adequately one would have to be a prophet. "Public Housing in the City of Tomorrow" -- that is a baffling subject even to a houser who has often been called upon to walk courageously "where angels fear to tread."

But perhaps we can learn something about the City of Tomorrow by looking back at the City of Yesterday.

In early colonial days our cities lacked even the most elemental public services. The provision of water supply was left to private initiative. There were no private hospitals. There were no public schools. The individual homeowner not only had to be his own street cleaner but had to pave the street in front of his house also.

We have come a long way since then. But not without continuous struggle against those who opposed every new public service as favoring some people more than others, as threatening to bankrupt the nation, as a step toward socialism or as unconstitutional.

I would like to refer you to the "Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin". In 1751 Franklin asked the Pennsylvania Assembly to grant \$2000 for building a hospital in Philadelphia. To quote from the Autobiography:

"The country members did not at first relish the project. They objected that it could only be serviceable to the city and therefore the citizens alone should be at the expense of it; and they doubted whether the citizens themselves generally approved of it....."

But despite the headshakings of conservative-minded members of the Pennsylvania Assembly, Franklin finally obtained his \$2000 appropriation. With this money was built the first hospital in all of Colonial America. And today we have publicly supported hospitals in every city in the country.

Let us thumb through the pages of history again.

In 1817 Congress passed a certain bill and sent it to President Monroe for his signature. But Monroe vetoed the bill on the ground that it was unconstitutional. In 1822 a similar bill went to President Madison. Madison vetoed the bill for the same reason. Similar legislation was vetoed by President Jackson in 1830 and by President Pierce in 1854.

What was the content of these highly unconstitutional bills?

Nothing more harmful than the appropriation of certain sums for public roads and other public works. Yet back in 1854 the thought of spending federal funds for internal improvements struck terror into the hearts of statesmen. Listen to the words with which President Pierce attacked the idea of federal subsidies for public works:

"It is quite obvious, that if there be any constitutional power which authorizes the construction of railroads and canals by Congress, the same power must comprehend turnpikes and ordinary carriage roads; nay, it must extend to the construction of bridges, to the draining of marshes, to the erection of levees, to the construction of canals of irrigation... In fact, not only public instruction, but hospitals, establishments of science and art, libraries and indeed everything pertaining to the internal welfare of the country are just as much objects of internal improvements as canals and railways...."

But times changed. People changed. Our interpretation of the Constitution changed. In the end the canals were built. The railroads were subsidized. And through these expenditures the basis was laid for our 20th century industrial economy.

Let us turn to another field of public endeavor.

In 1850 the New York State Legislature repealed a certain law which it has passed only a few months previously. The Editor of the Freeman's Journal of New York City thereupon printed the following paean of triumph:

"Hurrah for Repeal! . . . The law voted blindly at the general election last fall has been submitted anew by Legislature to the popular vote. Many thanks to the Legislature for the opportunity thus afforded us for making our step backward from the downward course of State monopoly, State despotism and State socialism into which recent legislative movements have been hurrying us."

And what was this despotic law that was repealed? It was merely a law providing for free schools -- something that we now all accept as part of our everyday life.

But now let us see if we can find some quotations that will shed light on housing itself in the City of Yesterday.

Perhaps a quotation from the learned Judge Bartlett of the New York Court of Appeals in the year 1880 will reward our search. In that year Judge Bartlett said:

"A sound public policy certainly dictates that at this time, when the rights of property and liberty of the citizen are sought to be invaded by every form of subtle and dangerous legislation, the courts should see to it that those benign principles of the common law which are the shield of personal liberty and private property suffer no impairment."

What was the legislature trying to do that seemed so terrifying to the good Judge?

At its previous session the Legislature had simply enacted a law compelling landlords to provide running water on every floor of a tenement house in New York City. That was all. That sanitary requirement seemed to the Judge of 1880 as terrifying and as subversive as the United States Housing Act may seem to some people today.

One more quotation. In 1880 the large number of privy vaults in certain sections of Philadelphia produced a health hazard that could not be ignored. The Philadelphia Board of Health decided to act. It ordered the owners of certain slum buildings to replace the foul privy vaults with more modern facilities. The slum owners appealed to the State Supreme Court. I will quote from the decision that was handed down:

"But the cause of this nuisance was not the privy-well itself, but its contents. The mere hole in the ground was not a nuisance. When, therefore, the well was cleaned and purified, the cause of the nuisance was removed. It is true, it might become a nuisance again. In such event, it would require to be again cleansed. The order requiring the owners to put in water-closets, if sustained by this Court, might be far-reaching in its consequences, and lead to serious and obnoxious abuses."

As you may guess, the Philadelphia Board of Health was overruled.

We have come a long way since 1880. Today, there is not one court in the country that has challenged our public housing legislation. In 14 states legislation enabling the formation of local housing authorities and their participation in the USHA program has been brought before the higher courts. And on 14 occasions the courts have upheld the cause of public housing.

So let us take heart. The public housing movement is a new movement. It is really less than 5 years old in this country. We have come far in that time. We have made more progress in a few years than the proponents of public education and public roads made in many decades. As USHA Administrator, in contact with hundreds of communities throughout the United States, I can tell you with confidence that public housing is here to stay.

In 1850, when the free school law of New York State was repealed, there were many who prophesied the doom of the free school movement. Today similar mutterings can be heard about public housing. I can promise you that in the City of Tomorrow today's prophets of doom will be as completely and as utterly forgotten as the enemies of free schools are today. History is against them. The great social advance which they seek to block will become a great social achievement. In the City of Tomorrow public housing will be of a size and character that will spell final victory in our war to destroy the slums and will help implant an American standard of living in every American home.