

THE HOUSING PROBLEM

It is no easy matter to find a flat in the canton of Geneva, as most of our staff members know only too well. In this respect it may be interesting for staff members, visiting scientists, research associates and fellows to hear from the General Services of the Personnel Office (Housing Service) about some of the difficulties experienced daily in this field—as well as the measures envisaged for overcoming them.

Statistics are often despised, but a glance at them can be enlightening. The population of Geneva increases by 18 or 19 every day, taking into account arrivals and departures, births and deaths, but not counting seasonal workers.

The Rent Control Office of the City of Geneva and the Cantonal Housing Office, both run by the State of Geneva, have on file numerous request for accommodation. The exact number is unfortunately not known, but it can be estimated at about 2 500 for each of these offices. This figure, which varies according to different authorities, probably does not give an accurate picture of present requirements.

In spite of this depressing picture, every month, about 20 to 25 staff members and their families find flats through the CERN Housing Service, which would very much like to double this figure.

Where building is concerned, the great difficulty is to find sites at a reasonable price. On account of the growing demand in this sector, most landowners are holding on to their land in the hope of getting a better price. This policy encourages the

profiteering fostered by such a situation where ever it arises. Many groups even seem anxious to slow down the building of blocks of flats or villas—which is already very expensive—in the hope that increased demand will maintain the price level and keep rents high.

However, it is hoped that in a few years' time prices will become steadier, in view of the drastic measures planned by the City of Geneva.

Where does CERN's housing service come into the picture to help the staff members?

The Service collects information to give staff members as much help as possible in obtaining accommodation. The part it plays cannot be compared to that of a housing Agency because, unfortunately, it has no blocks of flats or funds at its disposal. Consequently it is rather difficult to get the desired results. In practice priority is given to new arrivals, but this does not mean that the Service neglects the others. A factor which still complicates the situation is the fact that most staff members prefer accommodation on the right bank (on the Jura side of the Lake of Geneva), which reduces their chances by about 50 %.

It should be noted that CERN is the only international organization in Geneva which has had a Housing Service in operation for several years.

In an attempt to overcome the increasing difficulties, the Housing Service has explored every avenue likely to lead to the solution of these problems. As a result of contacts with personalities connected with the

Percentage of vacant flats

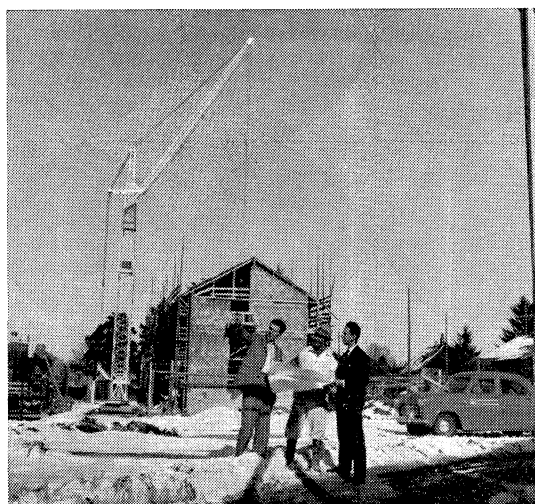
Period	Total accommodation available in Geneva	% vacant
January 1958	68 845	0,0044
July 1958	69 764	0,028
December 1958	71 000	0,017
January 1959	71 452	0,016
July 1959	71 478	0,015
January 1960	72 204	0,017

City of Geneva and representatives of building societies, various projects have been envisaged for the near or more distant future, including building blocks of flats at Versoix, Châtelaine, Meyrin, Grand-Saconnex and possibly Petit-Saconnex, and in France. CERN would then have considerable accommodation available for its staff.

However, neither these contacts nor the expansion of the Housing Service—which is, in any event, ruled out by the CERN budget—could entirely solve the housing problem for CERN staff members. Therefore it is encouraging to learn that during the last few weeks the Geneva authorities have been holding a serious enquiry, with special regard to the difficulties experienced by the staff of international organizations. Meetings have been held to decide upon emergency measures. At the first of these meetings Mr. Max Petitpierre, President of the Swiss Confederation, and the Directors-General of the main international organizations (including CERN) were present. Practical building schemes are being planned both in Geneva and in the frontier region.

Accordingly, it is hoped that things will improve during 1961 and that CERN staff members will no longer have the worries they have experienced in former years.

Until that time J. van der Meer-schen and J.P. Chambon will do their very best; all they ask is not to be expected to do the impossible.



To supply adequate housing for new staff members requires many special dispositions. Here, J. van der Meersch (left) and J.P. Chambon discuss with a foreman the particulars of a building where several apartments are reserved for CERN staff.