

# FURNISHING HOMES IN WARTIME

## Design and Construction in Britain

### A KORERO Report

**B**ETWEEN AUGUST, 1940, and November, 1942, the Luftwaffe demolished 250,000 British homes and damaged 2,500,000 more. To meet the national need for cheap, durable furniture to replace that destroyed, Dr. Hugh Dalton, as President of the Board of Trade, appointed a committee to advise on the production of utility furniture of sound construction and in simple and agreeable designs. This committee was headed by industrial art designer Charles Tennyson, grandson of the poet, and included architects, social workers, furniture-manufacturers, designers, and one housewife.

The committee aimed to supply all the main articles of furniture required for a reasonable standard of comfort in the home. But in doing this, it had, of course, to study the pressing need for economy in raw materials and labour. Some of the usual materials were not available, and several alternatives, such as plastics, were being used for direct war production. Obviously the full pre-war range of furniture could not be maintained. The committee found itself unable, for instance, to include a three-piece upholstered suite because of the quantity of scarce materials that would be required in its manufacture. But in its place it specified some simple types of easy chair with sufficient spring construction to make them comfortable and restful for leisure-hours. It included also a bed-settee and a bed-chair for those who use the same room by night as by day.

The principal materials employed in this furniture were timber and hardboard, which is a compressed wood

fibre an eighth of an inch thick. The hardboard veneered on both sides, acted as a substitute for plywood, which was no longer available in Britain. As the necessary materials for giving the normal type of finish were scarce, the furniture had a simple matt-wax finish, which was said to be pleasant to look at and easy to keep in condition. Altogether there were in the first edition of utility furniture forty-five designs of seventeen essential pieces.

The living-room suite shown below sold at £22 2s. 3d. Other designs were available from about £16. The table-top in this particular suite was 3 ft. square when closed, and 5 ft. by 3 ft. when the leaves were extended. The sideboard was 4 ft. wide, 2 ft. 9 in. high and 1 ft. 6 in. deep. The chairs had loose padded seats covered with leather cloth, in a variety of colours. All the living-room furniture was in oak-stained, with a matt-wax finish in light or dark shades as preferred.

Bedroom furniture was in oak, too, but some pieces could be obtained in

