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House-Buying Dodgers Irresponsible

EXPERTS analyzing the depressed housing market have listed just about every possible cause, except one. That is the number of people who do not want to take on the responsibilities of home ownership.

This may be symptomatic of neglected responsibilities in other areas of life. Many citizens do not want to take on responsibilities of finding out which candidates are better and voting for them. Others avoid their share of responsibilities as members of their churches, as patrons of the schools their children attend, and as supporters of the United Fund and other worthy causes.

By no means do all residents of apartments and condominiums shirk their responsibilities as citizens. Part of them are unable to do house or yard work and others do not need large living spaces. However, there is a sizable segment of transient "cliff dwellers" who want the easy life but don't want to be bothered with details and responsibilities.

Apartments and condominium residences make it easy for people to get along without having to worry about keeping the lawn, the flowers or the swimming pool, and frequently they extend this attitude of irres-

pensibility into business, politics and community life. They want the benefits but prefer that others carry the full load of responsibility.

Of course, there are many home owners who may be just as neglectful as apartment dwellers. They are readily identifiable by weeds, trash and general neglect of their properties.

In several cities, programs have been launched to allow people without adequate housing to take over rundown homes or new shell houses with the proviso that they contribute labor and materials needed to bring the residences up to acceptable community standards.

Even though it is estimated that "sweat equity" yields returns of \$10 to \$15 per hour worked, the idea is not spreading very fast. Volunteers for this kind of work and responsibility are not numerous.

Plans for shifting more of the responsibilities for home ownership to the federal government are more numerous. Millions want to buy top-notch housing at bargain prices, with small down payments, and long term, low interest loans, with less responsibility.

Russia has done a great deal in

the way of building and selling or renting housing space on government terms, but the Soviet system has a few catches that Americans wouldn't like. One is that the government assigns people to live in certain spaces, and another is that those with most political pull somehow are assigned to the choicest apartments. But we are headed in that direction.

A new book, "My Petition for More Space", may portend what is coming. A fictional single person at some future date is described as he applies to the government for the maximum allowable living space, 8 by 12 feet. He now has to keep all of his belongings and sleep in an open dormitory area of only 7 by 11 feet.

Of course, he encounters a tangle of bureaucratic red tape, because shuffling millions of other pedestrians (no room for cars) also would like to have more space. Too many people without responsibility.

We are a long way from that degree of congestion and loss of freedom, but it could happen if too many citizens shirk their responsibilities. Freedom is a responsibility that cannot be transferred.