

*Housing*

Last week the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) made it clear that he had no intention of setting up a separate ministry of housing and urban affairs. If reports can be believed, the proposal for financial assistance to municipalities to enable them to establish land banks has also been turned down by the cabinet. Certainly we will know better when the legislation is brought down whether or not this recommendation is going to be accepted.

All of this has brought us to the place where the minister responsible for housing has submitted his resignation to the Prime Minister, and I submit, Mr. Speaker, that this resignation deals with something much more fundamental than housing. It deals with the whole question of the lack of government initiative in dealing with the most pressing national problems confronting the country.

I read from the report in yesterday's *Ottawa Journal* containing statements made by the Minister of Transport at his press conference yesterday morning:

The country, he related, "expected me to do something about these things, housing, urban affairs, pollution. But in the Prime Minister's conception of federalism, these are provincial responsibilities. The Prime Minister's constitutional theories sound fine in the classroom—the trouble is they just won't work.

People expect the federal government to provide full employment—without this insidious inflation—to take action on clean air and clean water. These are the bread and butter issues. But these are the issues the Prime Minister says must be left to the provinces while he sorts out the constitutional priorities."

May I also refer to the minister's letter of resignation dated April 24 in which he says in part:

Having spent much of my adult life in the parliament and government of our country, I need hardly tell you how difficult a decision this has been for me. As we have discussed, however, I find myself increasingly disturbed with the directions and policies being followed by the government. I feel there is a lack of initiative in using federal powers to deal with issues such as housing, pollution, inflation and urban development which are so vital to the needs of ordinary people in our modern, industrialized society.

Given these circumstances and after the most thoughtful consideration on my part, I feel I have no alternative but to resign from the cabinet.

I submit that the Minister of Transport has put his finger on the basic reason for the government's lack of initiative, namely, the fact that the Prime Minister's conception of our federal system, as the Minister of Transport said yesterday, is to have ten strong

[Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands).]

provincial governments headed by a weak federal government.

• (2:10 p.m.)

Last year in the course of the federal election the Prime Minister fooled a lot of people by talking of one Canada and national unity. What he failed to tell them was that his concept of national unity consisted of a 19th century interpretation of the constitution of Canada. He held that the only important change required in the British North America Act was to guarantee language rights, and that a reallocation of federal and provincial responsibilities was relatively unimportant and unnecessary. Mr. Speaker, we reject that viewpoint. We believe the constitution is not sacrosanct. We believe the constitution was made for man, not man for the constitution. After all, what is a constitution? A constitution is the legal framework within which a nation lives, moves and has its being. It is not the law of Moses handed down from Mount Sinai. A constitution must be a living organism that grows to meet expanding social needs and adjusts to meet changing conditions and changing circumstances.

I contend that the Prime Minister's concept of the constitution will bring about in this country stagnation, regional discord and national disunity. I submit it is unworkable for three reasons. First of all, it fails to recognize that the provinces and municipalities do not have the sources of revenue necessary to discharge the responsibilities assigned them under the British North America Act. Education, health, welfare and resource development were relatively unimportant areas in 1867, but in 1969 they are beyond the capacity of the provincial and municipal governments under their present taxing powers.

Second, I would point out that the present division of powers can only result in wider regional disparities. Affluent provinces will be able to enjoy fairly reasonable standards of services while the people of the poorer provinces, even when taxed to the hilt, will be required to content themselves with a lower standard of living.

Liberal governments in the past have paid lip service to the basic premise of the Rowell-Sirois report which said that all Canadians, irrespective of where they live, should be able to enjoy minimum standards of education, health and welfare. It is the failure to deal with this problem which is the real threat to national unity. Nothing will do more to tear this country apart than to have some