

Supply—Resources and Development

parliament has appropriated \$20 million against which only \$1,150,000 has yet been committed. Under section 13 on account of loans for rental housing, parliament has appropriated \$150 million against which approximately \$99 million has been committed. Under section 16, parliament has appropriated for experimental plumbing and heating equipment, \$5 million against which nothing has been committed. Under section 27A parliament has appropriated \$5 million for housing research and community planning, against which \$1,700,000 in round figures has to date been committed. In total, Mr. Chairman, against an aggregate parliamentary appropriation of \$480 million, the commitments to date total in round figures \$333 million.

There has been within the past year and a half a startling decline in construction. It is evidenced not only in the completions but it is very strongly evidenced in starts. We of the official opposition levelled strong criticism against the government for the abandonment without any authority from parliament early in February 1951 of the provision made by parliament at the fall session of 1949 for the equivalent of second mortgage loans in addition to the loans provided under part I of the National Housing Act—what was commonly called the additional one-sixth loans. We have said that it is no mere coincidence that the evidence of decline in housing starts which occurred then coincided with this declaration of a new policy on the part of the government.

Now, there are many figures available, Mr. Chairman, exceedingly valuable in the information they contain, but I must pass on as swiftly as I can. I mention in passing that that situation continued into the spring of 1951 when housing starts compared with the year 1950 particularly showed a decline; and I will give you just the total percentage figures, Mr. Chairman, without worrying about the decimal figures: April 4 per cent; May 19 per cent; June 26 per cent; July 41 per cent; August 37 per cent; September 51 per cent; October 51 per cent; November 46 per cent; December 54 per cent. You see how startling are those figures of the reduction in the number of housing starts in the last months of 1951 as compared with the corresponding months of 1950.

Now, that decline continued into the year 1952. I am going to give you a comparison with 1951, but a comparison with the figures for 1950 would show a very much greater decline percentage-wise. January 1952 showed a decline of 42 per cent in housing starts as compared with January 1951. February

declined 29 per cent. Then, in March what might appear at first blush to be a reversal of the trend appeared and housing starts increased 4.6 per cent as compared with March, 1951. April, 1952, increased 2 per cent as compared with April, 1951. However, Mr. Mansur cautioned us against attaching too much importance as yet to what appeared to be a slight reversal of the trend in March and April, because he said there were certain additional factors which would account for at least a substantial portion of the increase.

Since the committee has risen, one learns with regret, from the daily bulletin of the dominion bureau of statistics of June 27, that the May figures for starts show a sharp decline as compared with the month of May, 1951. The first paragraph of the report in the bulletin reads:

Starts on the construction of new dwelling units showed a further sharp reduction in May as compared with the corresponding month last year, while completions were down only slightly. Starts totalled 7,121 units as compared with 11,699 a year earlier, and the completions numbered 5,325 units, compared with 5,688.

Then it proceeds:

During the first five months of this year starts fell in number to 14,395 from 17,252 in the corresponding period of 1951, and completions declined to 18,391 units from 25,209. The number in various stages of construction at the end of May was down to 38,814 units from 51,090 a year earlier.

There were declines in starts in all regions in May as compared with the corresponding month last year.

In my submission, Mr. Chairman, that is a report that may well cause concern, if not indeed alarm; that is a very startling rate of decline. I remind you, sir, that this decline is compared with the corresponding period in 1951 when a heavy decline had already set in as compared with the year 1950. If we compared these 1952 figures with the year 1950, we would see a most startling reduction, not only in starts but in the completion of houses in Canada. While we have no final figures today of the estimated shortage of housing, nevertheless it seems to me there is sufficient in these figures showing the decline in housing construction to emphasize beyond question that housing is still a very serious problem in Canada.

There is no longer a shortage of building materials. It is agreeable indeed, Mr. Chairman, to be assured by Mr. Mansur that there is today a plentiful supply of building materials of all kinds.

Housing costs are still a very difficult factor to contend with. It is estimated by Mr. Mansur that housing costs in 1952 are, and will continue to be, 5 per cent higher than in 1951.