

know what the policy of the department is with respect to the staff houses which are no longer required. We have in the town of Amherst a staff house built when war industries were very active. Although this staff house was not recommended by the local citizens, it was built and served a purpose for a time, but only for a very short time. It has been vacant now for the best part of a year. I should like to hear from the minister what is the policy with respect to the disposal of the ordinary houses, the sale of them to occupants and others, and also as to the disposal of staff houses.

Mr. HOWE: As long as there is a demand for low-rental housing it is not the policy of the government to sell houses. In certain cases we have agreements with municipalities calling for the removal of the houses at the end of a certain period, usually twelve months after the war. If municipalities wish to carry out this agreement we are perfectly ready to do so. To date we have had no requests. I think if we had attempted to carry out our agreement there would have been a strong protest from the towns. In some cases we have removed houses. We moved some from Nobel, some from Arvida, and several from the explosives plants, but always by agreement with the town. We have simply transferred them from one locality to another where the houses were more urgently needed, but no policy has been determined for the ultimate disposal of the houses because there is no indication that there will be a general surplus of houses for many years to come.

Where the agreements have expired we go to the municipalities and enter into new agreements if the municipalities wish for new agreements. We have entered into new agreements with several municipalities, turning the houses over from munitions projects to veterans projects.

As far as staff houses are concerned, if the staff houses are no longer required they are put up for disposal. Several have been disposed of. Some have been turned over to the Department of Veterans Affairs to be used as convalescent hospitals; others have been sold to municipalities for municipal purposes. Two or three have been sold for manufacturing purposes. They are available for disposal, provided that they are not required as staff houses.

Mr. BLACK (Cumberland): Is the government willing to sell individual houses to occupants who wish them for their homes, or who wish further to improve them by putting basements under them? In some cases I know there is a desire to make individual purchases.

[Mr. P. C. Black.]

Mr. HOWE: It is not the policy to sell, as long as there is a demand for low-rental houses. We have had many applications for the sale of houses; in some cases for the sale of whole housing developments. In view of the fact that many of the houses were built at a time of lower costs, perhaps we can sell all our houses at a profit. But it is not our intention to do so. The government, through Wartime Housing Limited, is meeting the requirements for low-rental houses; and as long as the demand is there, we shall continue to meet that demand.

Mr. McKAY: Has the minister explored the possibility of using prefabricated houses? We appreciate what has been done in the past year or two by Wartime Housing Limited. To a small degree it has relieved a serious situation. However, that situation is still grave. Thousands of young chaps are coming back from overseas with wives, and in many instances they are looking for dwelling places.

The minister has referred to the construction of prefabricated houses at Longueuil, Quebec. I understand these are to a great extent, aluminum constructed houses.

Mr. MacNICOL: No, they are not.

Mr. McKAY: From what I can gather there are other concerns in Canada which are constructing homes made of plywood and prefabricated lumber. I do not know a great deal about this matter, but yesterday or the day before in the veterans affairs committee I suggested that the whole matter might be explored, with a view to relieving the immediate situation as far as shortage of houses is concerned. If England, Sweden, Russia and the United States consider it good business to use prefabricated houses to relieve the immediate housing shortage, then I suggest that it would be good business for Canada to do something along the same lines.

Mr. MACKENZIE: If my colleague would permit me to interrupt, I wonder if we could make progress, realizing that every hon. member—not just one, but every one of us—knows that the housing situation to-day is one of the most serious conditions in Canada. May I pay tribute to my colleague because of the work Wartime Housing Limited has done, in the first place in connection with the work it has done in congested areas, which became congested on account of unavoidable war conditions. We have essayed in the Department of Veterans Affairs the construction of 3,000 houses.

The hon. member who has just spoken has heard all the evidence before the committee.