

Discussion on Housing

Mr. MacDonald (Prince): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Stewart: Certainly.

Mr. MacDonald (Prince): Is the hon. member advocating, in his last few remarks, some plan whereby we prevent people from moving from one place to another within this country, and in particular prevent them from moving to some of the larger centres where employment is more readily obtained?

Mr. Stewart: No, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member really makes the point of my comment in the last part of his question. I am suggesting that if we are going to spend hundreds of millions of dollars it would be far, far better to expend that money to base business and employment away from these focal points.

Mr. Herridge: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stewart: I am suggesting that it would be far, far better to give people jobs in places in which they could live more comfortably, without many of the problems of population concentration, rather than spending the same amount of money or even more to enable them to survive at all and have to commute 25 or 35 miles to their work and live in a very bad environment. I use the words "bad environment" with almost every connotation of the expression.

The last point I want to deal with is one to which the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) himself adverted last night. It refers to the whole question of the municipal tax on homes. On April 26, 1967, when speaking to the conference of the Canadian Tax Foundation, the Minister of Finance, despite the fact that the commission had been set up by the previous government, said with approval that the Carter commission report had come to the conclusion that this tax is regressive and is bearing heavily upon the poor. I say "despite the fact that the commission had been set up by the previous government" to emphasize not that the commission report is wrong on this point, but that the Minister of Finance was quoting it on this point with great approval. The minister again referred to this problem in the house in this debate.

But, Mr. Speaker, an even more austere authority has spoken on this point. I refer again to the Economic Council of Canada. The Economic Council says at page 215 of its fourth annual review:

Examination of the historical record suggests that the financial structure of Canadian municipalities was reasonably well adapted to the requirements

of the late nineteenth century. But modernization of this nineteenth century machinery has failed to keep pace with the needs of accentuated urbanization in this century.

The review goes on to develop this point and at page 218 we come to this sentence:

Real property taxes continued to account for more than three-quarters of the total revenue from the municipalities' own sources over the period 1953-63 and it is worth noting that they rose more than one and a half times as rapidly as personal income.

The review goes on to document the implications of the passages I have read. I would hope that when the federal-provincial conference on urban problems takes place—this conference was foreshadowed in the speech from the throne—what the Minister of Finance has said repeatedly and what the Economic Council of Canada has said on this question of taxation on homes will not be forgotten. I should think this would be one of the two or three most important topics to be discussed by the members of that conference.

We are conducting a debate on housing. The opposition raised this matter in the house last week, so I was just a little surprised that they returned to the same topic this week as a basis for their first post-reformation supply amendment. Clearly what they are trying to do is sort out their own thinking.

Mr. MacDonald (Prince): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit another question?

Mr. Stewart: Yes, Mr. Speaker, if I have time.

Mr. Speaker: I am afraid the hon. member does not have time because his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. There may be agreement to allow the hon. member to continue beyond his time, but I should bring to the attention of the house that a large number of hon. members have expressed a desire to take part in the debate and only two hours and 20 minutes are left.

Mr. Stewart: I shall be very brief in answering the question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacDonald (Prince): My question requires a very simple answer. Does the hon. member believe there is a housing crisis in the country today? Yes or no.

Mr. Stewart: There is a housing shortage. Whether one calls it a crisis depends on what