

Inquiries of the Ministry

some indication prior to now concerning whether or not this correspondence will be made available.

Mr. Speaker: Shall the remaining Notices of Motions stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**HOUSING****DROP IN STARTS AND GOVERNMENT POLICY OF RESTRAINT—MEASURES TO PROMOTE CONSTRUCTION**

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Minister of Finance whether the serious drop in housing starts in the month of May to an annual rate of less than 130,000 units is a drop which is taking place according to plan as part of the government policy of restraint and whether it is consistent with the guidelines policy the government has adopted?

Hon. E. J. Benson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I should like to see housing starts expand greatly.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, is it the policy of the government that the expansion of housing starts to a reasonable level would have an inflationary or anti-inflationary effect?

Mr. Benson: Mr. Speaker, I find that question concerning whether it would have an inflationary or anti-inflationary effect very difficult to answer. I do not think it would have an inflationary effect.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the serious decline in housing starts that has taken place not only causes great hardship to individuals but would seem quite obviously to be inflationary in the sense that it pushes up the cost of living and therefore an increase in the wages that persons expect, is the minister prepared to announce in the House, in light of these very alarming figures, measures that he proposes to take to have housing starts return to something like a satisfactory, sensible and normal figure?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I may be able to assist a little on this. I have a report from the minister responsible for housing. I do wish to indicate the government's concern about these low figures and to repeat—

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An hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: Perhaps you do not want an explanation.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: You sound like Rawhide.

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is much the same as that of the Leader of the Opposition. I would ask the Prime Minister to set forth the position of the government concerning ways and means to improve housing starts in Canada in view of the serious decline in the first five months of this year.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It would seem to me that the question asked by the hon. member for Broadview is very wide in scope. He might wish to rephrase it. He is inviting a minister of the Crown to make a general statement. I do not think this should be done at this time.

Mr. Gilbert: Mr. Speaker, would the Prime Minister make a statement before Parliament adjourns with regard to measures the government intends to take to solve the serious decline in housing starts in view of the 50.1 per cent drop in urban starts in the first five months of this year?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I will pass this suggestion on to the minister.

Mr. Stanfield: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the Prime Minister if he would stop playing games with a subject of great importance not only to this House but the country—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanfield: —and indicate to the House whether the government proposes to take any measures to meet this very serious situation and, very briefly, what these measures might be?

Mr. Trudeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, sometimes it is difficult to know if members of the opposition really want all the facts or if they are interested in playing politics with the situation.

Mr. Baldwin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 39 members of the House are entitled to ask questions. Ministers do not have to answer but if they do the answers should not be frivolous, glib, evasive and non-responsive.