

The Address—Mr. Thatcher

Where are they to get homes? The demand for housing has never been greater in our history. What about the supply of new houses? Even the minister, in his remarks on October 16, was forced to admit that the supply of new homes was disappointing. Referring to section 35 of the National Housing Act, as reported at page 79 of *Hansard*, he said:

... the results ... have, in the over-all, not been as great as might have been hoped.

What an understatement, Mr. Speaker! According to the dominion bureau of statistics, in the face of the greatest demand we have ever had for new houses, starts are falling off sharply and drastically. I refer hon. members to the latest report of the dominion bureau of statistics on new residential construction. In May of this year, according to page 9, 11,699 houses were started as against 13,647 for a year ago. In June there were 9,514 starts as compared with 12,065 a year ago. In July the figure was 6,123 as compared with 10,245 a year ago—a 40 per cent drop. In August there were 7,461 as against 9,306 a year ago; and in September, the last month for which figures are available, there were 5,538 as against 10,245 in 1950—a drop of 46 per cent. Yet the minister tells us that a great effort is being made!

I wish today categorically to deny his assertion. I do not see how any government supporter, even a real friend of the minister, can defend the inertia, the indifference and the complete ineptitude which his department has shown in getting houses started in Canada. In view of the staggering need for houses, what did the minister offer us earlier this session? I think that once again even his colleagues would admit that about all he offered Canadians were platitudes and generalities. I quote from page 79 of *Hansard*:

"The government is well aware of the continuing need . . ."

"Flexibility has been the keynote to the government's approach to this important problem . . ."
"the problem is being kept under continuous review . . ."

I respectfully suggest that there is not much boldness, much imagination, or much pioneering spirit in those statements.

I know that the minister is a kindly and well-meaning gentleman, but I think it is my duty to say that his inaction should stir up the wrath of every hon. member of this house, regardless of his politics. The taxpayers of Canada this year are paying the minister \$22,000. His chief and all-important job, as I understand it, is to try to provide decent houses for Canadians. I say that he is falling down on that job. Why are so few houses being built in Canada? Last spring the minister told us that it was

because of a shortage of materials. That may be partly true, but I cannot accept it as the main factor. Certainly I can tell the house that, in the hardware line, there are not many housing materials in short supply. There are plenty of nails, lock sets and building paper. As a matter of fact, during this past year most merchants have been plagued by inventories which have been too heavy. I have talked to many lumber dealers, who also denied that there were shortages in lumber. As far as material shortages are concerned, I think the fact of the matter is that the minister and his department once again erred in appraising the situation last spring. The minister admitted as much a few weeks ago, as reported at page 78 of *Hansard*:

... and the defence construction program was not absorbing all the materials anticipated . . .

But even if there have been shortages, Mr. Speaker, then I say it is the full and complete responsibility of the Minister of Resources and Development; because last spring he told this house that housing would receive a priority for essential materials second only to defence industries themselves. In fact, as every hon. member knows, housing has received almost no priority for materials within the past six months. The minister admitted that fact in reply to a question asked by the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Fleming) a few weeks ago. As reported at page 80 of *Hansard*, he said:

At the present time, no system of allocations or priorities has been planned for other than defence workers' houses.

No priorities for houses! Can we wonder if the program is lagging? We are all conscious of how necessary it is to get the defence effort well under way. But surely, in times of peace, even defence industries should share materials with housing. During these past months I have seen bank buildings going up, office buildings and buildings for commercial enterprises of various kinds. Where did they get materials? Here in Ottawa I have seen the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation build a spacious and costly building out on the Montreal road. I suppose enough material to build one hundred houses went into that building. What kind of priority did that building have?

Many Canadians today are beginning to wonder if the minister is deliberately taking steps to impede and discourage housing in Canada. Certainly every time he takes a step, it seems to have such a result. Hon. members will recall that last February the minister announced that the down payment on houses, under the National Housing Act, would be increased from 10 to 20 per cent; and that