

National Housing Act

in population. Populations have increased in many other countries which are facing housing needs.

I suggest that the minister might go back and read an article which I think was referred to in debate at the time the National Housing Act was passed in 1954. I believe it was written by Sidney Margolius. It was an article which appeared in *Maclean's* magazine and it gave a summary of housing activities in various countries, including Great Britain, the United States and a number of European countries. The conclusion the writer arrives at is that we have nothing to be proud about in our housing record. I cannot recall the exact heading of the article at the moment but it was quite indicative of the fact that, in his opinion, Canada was falling far behind other nations with respect to the provision of adequate housing.

Mr. Philpott: You are two or three years behind the times.

Mr. Ellis: I know the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Philpott) is the leading government apologist in these matters.

Mr. Philpott: Show me a country that is building more houses per capita than we are. We are building more houses per capita than any other country in the world.

Mr. Ellis: If the hon. member thinks that is correct, then I suggest he can get up during this debate and put on the record his attitude toward this matter. He can tell us his side of the story. I am sure he will have to go a long way before he will be able to justify the lack of decision and apathy of the government toward the provision of houses. Again I say the crux of the problem is not merely one of construction. It is a question of getting rid of a great deal of obsolescent housing in this country.

I am not going to take the time, Mr. Speaker, but I could quote from this book references to minimum standards for house construction. I see a reference to materials being non-inflammable, and so forth. I have made reference to the disastrous loss of life, particularly of children, in fires, many of which are attributable in large measure to faulty construction. I know that a short while ago a summary of the findings of a coroner's inquest appeared in one of the Ottawa newspapers, which revealed that pressed paper had been used in the partitions of one house. Such a house would go up in flames in a matter of minutes and it would be almost impossible for anyone inside to escape. That is only one aspect of the problem.

If the minister or any supporter of the government feels proud of the government's

[Mr. Ellis.]

record in so far as the removal of substandard housing in this country is concerned or the provision of the decent type of housing that is envisaged in this report, and I presume the type of housing to which the Minister of Trade and Commerce referred in 1945 and 1947, then I suggest they get up in the house and tell us just what the government has done to provide low rental housing for people on low incomes, and what the government has done or proposes to do now toward the elimination of slum areas from Canada.

Mr. Winters: Many members could do that.

Mr. C. E. Johnston (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to take too long in speaking on this matter on this occasion. I have dealt with it nearly every year since the National Housing Act has been in existence, and for many years before that. I have discussed the subject on every occasion on which it has come up in the house. I think the minister is well aware of some of the criticisms I have made.

I do want to say that since this minister has taken over these duties he has given a very attentive ear to some of the criticisms that have been levelled at him. I do say, too, he has not always been so antagonistic as some of the other ministers appear to be when suggestions are offered to him. I am sure that on many occasions he has investigated some of the complaints, and that as a result a better housing program is developing.

Certainly I can recall that when the housing program started after the war, and for a number of years following the conclusion of the war, there were undoubtedly poor types of houses built. But my purpose in speaking at this time is not to go back and review all those conditions. I do not think the government should be too complacent about the number of homes that have been started or the number that have been completed. I know the minister has told us how many starts there have been and that there were 127,000 completions. I think that is a fairly good record. I am not criticizing the government from that standpoint. I think there were 135,000 starts. I do not want to be critical of the government in any case in which it is not deserved. I only criticize them when criticism is justified.

While the 135,000 completions seem to be a very worth-while accomplishment, and as I said a moment ago it is, we should remember that even though there were that many completions last year it does not even begin to catch up with the backlog. According to the builder-contractor statement I put on the