

party do not care whether it takes the form of capital investment. I know perfectly well that at some time in the future the minister intends that there shall be capital investment for this purpose. We do not care whether it takes the form of rent reduction or the form of a contribution. The fact of the matter is that none of the other levels of government can proceed without the leadership and help of the federal government. The amendment I have moved reads:

That the government should forthwith enlist the active co-operation of the provincial and municipal governments for the setting up in municipalities which have need of them of local housing authorities to provide low-rent housing for veterans who cannot afford present economic rentals, and for the purpose of clearing slums and rehousing families living in slum accommodation.

The purpose of this amendment is to assist the municipalities and the provinces in bringing this matter to an immediate and practical head.

Mr. J. E. MATTHEWS (Brandon): Mr. Speaker, when speaking outside this chamber I have on various occasions gone out of my way to extol the calibre of federal members irrespective of party. I have no regrets for having done so, but I confess a measure of disappointment at the unfairness that has characterized a great many of the addresses on the housing situation. I am still more disappointed because of the sources of a large part of that criticism.

To hon. members at large it must have been disappointing, almost pitiable in fact, that few of the critics gave voice to one constructive, practical thought. I must name the hon. member who has just taken his seat (Mr. Timmins) and the hon. member for Lethbridge (Mr. Blackmore) as noted exceptions. How many hon. members even ventured to suggest what they would have done had they been minister of reconstruction during the last few years?

It is because of that unfairness, because of that pettiness, shall I say, that I raise my voice in support of the efforts of a minister who, all through the dark years of war, almost at the sacrifice of his own life, and right up to the present hour has given every ounce of energy in his being to further and safeguard the interests of the people of Canada. We must not forget that the minister of reconstruction has a record of achievement simply astounding in its proportions, a record which I feel free to say not another man in Canada could have excelled and few if any could have equalled. I cannot leave unchallenged some of the unfair remarks that

have been directed toward his work and the work of faithful officers in his department.

As we all know, during the war there was practically no residential building carried on. Many buildings already erected were not kept in repair because of lack of materials. Construction was confined to those mammoth projects which were erected with feverish haste all across Canada for military training and administration. During those years we were not interested in the building of homes. Instead of that, we concentrated on saving the homes we had, by winning the war and to that end supplying our soldiers with food and fighting equipment.

When hostilities ceased our first anxiety was to get those men who were spared back to their loved ones. Everyone realized the difficulties in that regard because of lack of shipping. Everyone realizes also that the conversion of war plants into peacetime production was no short process.

During this debate there have been repeated references to the Curtis report which attempted to set an objective for post-war building. I am wondering how many of those who participated in that report were actual builders, and how many were academic in their experience. No doubt all were actuated by the best of motives, but did they realize back in 1943 how great would be the changes in economic conditions following the war? It is because of those changes, completely and unavoidably unforeseen, that I suggest the Curtis report has become outmoded and can no longer be regarded as an authority.

But apart altogether from the Curtis report, here we were in this situation at the close of the war. There was no reserve of building material from which to draw, none whatever. Therefore men had to be secured to go to the logging camps and fell the trees, others in many cases to transport the lumber to the mills. Men who understood mining had to be secured to dig the coal, others to dig the ore, others to man the cement plants, and the quarries.

But in their simplicity, or is it simplicity, one would think, to hear some of those critics talk, that on the evening when hostilities ceased there was some magic button which the minister could have pressed, and pronto, the very next morning there would have been lumber and steel, yes, even nails, in fact an unlimited supply of all materials in every lumberyard and hardware store in the country. However, there was no magic button, but rather an avalanche of hard, stern facts confronting the minister at that time.

The Curtis report set a target of 750,000 housing units to be erected in ten years; that