

The Address—Mr. Nicholson

● (3:50 p.m.)

Hon. J. R. Nicholson (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, in rising to take part in this debate my first words must be words of congratulation to the mover (Mr. Jamieson) and seconder (Mr. Côté, Nicolet-Yamaska) of the address in reply to the speech from the throne. Rarely, if ever, on the several occasions when I have been present as a member of this house for the past five years and as a visitor during earlier years have I heard a more thoughtful, more inspiring or more eloquent address than that made by the hon. member for Burin-Burgeo on Tuesday afternoon. The hon. member for Nicolet-Yamaska also acquitted himself with distinction, and I heartily congratulate them both on their contribution to the debate in this chamber.

I also wish to avail myself of the opportunity to join in the expression of good wishes and congratulations to His Excellency the Governor General upon his assumption of this responsible and onerous duties. As has been said frequently during recent weeks, our new Governor General has served Canada with great distinction both at home and abroad. If you, Mr. Speaker, will permit a reference to a personal experience I am sure hon. members will find it of interest.

In January of 1966 I had the honour to represent Canada at the funeral in New Delhi of the late Prime Minister Shastri. While there I was a house guest of His Excellency and his gracious lady. As one might expect, during the two days I was there I saw a great deal of His Excellency who was then serving as our high commissioner. I was in his company when we met the acting prime minister, other leaders of government and equally prominent people in India. I was most impressed. I was very proud as a Canadian of the way in which our high commissioner was received by almost every person with whom we came into contact. He was received not only with respect but with warmth and, on one or two occasions, almost with affection. I was very proud, as I have said, to know that we were represented by such a fine person. I am sure his excellent work in India enhanced our prestige and that his work in the important new office he now holds will further increase that prestige.

Under normal circumstances a member of the government taking part in the debate on the address might be expected to deal at some length with the amendments which have been proposed to the motion. In his excellent

[Mr. Crouse.]

speech yesterday, however, the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) dealt so effectively with the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) and also, perhaps by way of anticipation, with the points raised by the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas) in his remarks earlier today, that I do not feel it is necessary for me to do so. The speech of my right hon. leader—and reference to *Hansard* will bear this out—dealt with those submissions so effectively that I feel my time could be spent to better advantage if I were to supplement what the Prime Minister had to say about Canada's serious housing situation. Your Honour will recall that some days ago I assured hon. members that I would be making such a statement and I am afraid I shall need all the time permitted under the rules if I am to do so even in what might be regarded as an inadequate way.

In view of the serious setback that we faced last year because of the disturbing drop in housing starts amounting to roughly 30,000 fewer than we would have liked, housing has been the focus of attention for a great deal of comment or criticism, if you like, during recent months both inside and outside this house. It might be advisable to point out that in many instances the critics have demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the true situation, and this applies to the remarks made on the subject yesterday by the Leader of the Opposition. Repeated attempts have been made to magnify our difficulties out of all proportion to the actual position. Hence the importance of an up to date report on Canada's housing situation.

I would begin by saying that the government is fully aware of the large number of new housing starts necessary to maintain and improve our national stock of living accommodation. But if we are fair with ourselves, however, we must recognize that housing is inevitably subject to the same economic pressures as is every other major industry in this country.

In this connection let me make it clear to a great many people who do not seem to appreciate it that the disquieting experience of 1966, and admittedly it was a disturbing one, does not represent anything new even in our postwar housing experience. Hon. members from western Canada, more particularly from British Columbia, will recall the situation which developed some years ago in downtown Vancouver when people moved into the old Hotel Vancouver, walked in from the street