

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

NATIONAL HOUSING ACT CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed from Tuesday, February 9, consideration of the motion of Mr. Cosgrove that Bill C-89, to amend the National Housing Act and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on National Resources and Public Works.

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, on February 3, an extraordinary letter was sent to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and was also released to the press gallery. It came from ten Liberal members of Parliament, including two Liberal cabinet ministers from Quebec. In that letter it was brought to the attention of the Prime Minister that there is a very serious and growing economic crisis in this country which needs to be addressed at the earliest opportunity by the government.

The letter made two recommendations. The first was for urgent action to stimulate the housing industry in Canada. The writers recognized that if we are to do something about unemployment in Canada, perhaps the most direct way is to ensure that Canadians can again see stimulation in the housing industry, that more housing is built, that the shortfall in housing units does not continue and that housing again becomes affordable.

The second action that was recommended was a special program to provide some assistance, particularly to young Canadians who find themselves unemployed today.

That letter was extraordinary for a couple of reasons, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it was extraordinary that ten members of the government caucus would have so lost confidence in the government's policies that they felt it necessary to lobby the government by issuing a public letter to the Prime Minister, calling upon him to reject the policies outlined in the federal budget.

The second thing, and it was even more extraordinary, was the fact that two members of cabinet chose to make a public break with their Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) and dissociate themselves from the policies he had enunciated. They called upon the minister to bring in new policies to correct problems he had caused.

If members of the Liberal caucus were concerned on February 3 about the effect of government policies upon unemployment and housing in Canada, those fears were borne out two days later when, last Friday, Statistics Canada issued new statistics which showed that well over one million Canadians cannot find jobs. Statistics Canada told Canadians on February 5 that in January of this year some 1,096,000 Canadians found themselves without jobs. There were fully 117,000 fewer

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Canadians working in January, 1982, than had been working in the previous January. This indicates that the crisis caused by the budget of the Minister of Finance is deepening dramatically and that the fears expressed by ten Liberal Members of Parliament were dramatically borne out when Statistics Canada released those figures on Friday.

● (1600)

The crisis in Canada today, which is being deepened so remarkably by the failure of leadership on the part of the Minister of Finance and his obstinate refusal to recognize the damage being done by his budget, has placed all Members of Parliament in a very difficult situation. But no Member of Parliament finds himself in a more difficult spot than members of the Liberal caucus. As they are confronted with this legislation before them today, the choice is very simple. Are they representatives of their constituencies in Ottawa, or are they representatives of Ottawa in their constituencies? Is it their job to go to Ottawa and express the concerns of their constituents who are suffering at the hand of the government's scorched-earth economic policies, or is it their job to sit mute and be silently complacent when government policies are wreaking so much havoc upon Canadians today?

Ten Liberal members of caucus felt that it was their job to express the points of view of their constituents, but many others have remained silent. When budgetary bills such as the one before us today have been called, many of them have said one thing to their constituents about how concerned they were, but when they stood in the House of Commons to vote, they made it clear that they put their party before their constituents. If there is to be any hope of redressing the serious economic crisis of today, Liberal Members of Parliament should be prepared to show the courage to put the country first and to recognize that they are here to do a job on behalf of their constituents.

The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Cosgrove) and some other ministers have recognized the fact that there is a serious housing crisis. Between 1980 and 1982 government projections show that there will likely be a shortfall of 143,000 housing units. We have a situation where housing is increasingly becoming unaffordable and in many centres is becoming totally unavailable.

The government's figures were last published in October, 1981. I should like to take a look at what they show in terms of vacancy rates faced by Canadian families who need accommodation in urban centres. In the Kitchener area the Liberal Member of Parliament is being called upon by his constituents to speak out. In October of last year the vacancy rate in Kitchener was 0.7 per cent. Most experts believe that the vacancy rate should be at least 3 per cent. This is why the constituents of the hon. member for Kitchener (Mr. Lang) are calling upon him to show some leadership. Liberal Members of Parliament from Toronto should be aware of the fact that their community had a vacancy rate of 0.3 per cent. In Oshawa, the constituency of the leader of the NDP, the vacancy rate in October was zero. In Vancouver and in Victoria the vacancy