

Mortgage Tax Credit

actions speak louder than words. We have the actions in front of us in the legislation, so we can dispense with the words.

For a much smaller amount of money we could have provided assistance, and could have written down interest rates for first-time home owners. We could have brought 100,000 people on to the market, rather than scaring 900,000 away.

Mr. Crosbie: Why didn't you do it in 16 years?

Mr. Axworthy: I do not know where the Minister of Finance was for the last 16 years.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Where were you?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Scott, Victoria-Haliburton): Order, please.

Mr. Axworthy: I thought we made an agreement with the hon. member opposite, Mr. Speaker. I thought he was to keep quiet for the rest of my speech. I thought we had a bargain, but maybe he looks at bargains as every other Tory does—you break them after five minutes. If he has broken that one, I will come in anyway—I will get the Liberal candidate to invite me.

The fact is, we could have provided direct assistance to first-time home owners which would have provided the stimulus for an envelope of something like \$60 million.

Hon. members opposite want to talk about expenditures of money. The poor minister responsible for housing does not get invited to the inner cabinet meetings to talk about the problems. In committee and in this House, he says he would love to do something about it but has not got the bucks. We just showed how to get the bucks. The Minister of Finance likes to say he is prepared to take recommendations and propositions. He has just received one—put some money into first time home owners; put some money into writing down interest rates for those who have to renegotiate their mortgages, give bridge financing so that people can get into the housing market or stay in it. The major beneficiaries of this program are not first time home owners but existing home owners who already have large mortgages at low interest rates.

The topsy-turvy equation that we are dealing with is that this amount of money is going to the people who need it least.

Mr. Fraleigh: Come into my riding and say that.

Mr. Axworthy: I will. We have received the invitation again, Mr. Speaker. He has just renewed the bargain. We will go back into his riding.

We think that with the same envelope—that magic word we now use—that same horizon of expenditures that we are talking about in terms of the initial \$600 million going into \$3 billion in four years' time, a tax credit program could have been introduced that would have been available for renters and home owners alike. With a little imagination and a little care and concern for the three-fifths of the Canadian population who receive nothing, we could have provided a basic residential

[Mr. Axworthy.]

operating expense tax credit in the neighbourhood of \$200 per year to provide for the increased expenditures they face through property taxation, and that they face through increases in maintenance costs and other carrying costs.

If that was the concern of the minister, and it is a legitimate concern and one that we share, a concern that cuts right across the housing market and right across every household, then he could have provided important relief and important cushioning, but on an equitable basis. Apparently that is not the Tory way of doing things. When it comes down to basic values and the basic proposition of who they think they are serving, then, as the Minister of Finance has said, they take the attitude, "We did not promise those renters anything so why should we do anything for them?" The point of dispute is that he had the capacity to do something for them. He had the opportunity to do something for them. He is making that kind of commitment. He could have aided and abetted his colleague, the minister responsible for housing, who is trying to do something for them.

Old Mr. Scrooge at Christmas time is not prepared to provide Christmas gifts for all Canadians. He is just doing it for those he thinks are his friends or, as the hon. gentleman from Kamloops said, just those people he thinks are going to vote for them. I have heard nothing more crass or more expedient in this House or in any other legislature, than that statement that "all we are doing is buying votes." That is the testimony that we have in front of us.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, what we can really say is that this is bad economic policy and bad housing policy. In his first major test the Minister of Finance has come up with a clinker. I will take at face value his offer that what we should try to do is be constructive about what is going on and try to offer alternatives. God knows it is going to take a more charitable spirit than has been displayed so far to penetrate that deep fog and mist in which the Minister of Finance exists.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this bill is badly in need of amendment. It needs to have its benefits extended; it must concentrate on the real problems in society; it must use its money more wisely, and it must have a much shorter—

Mr. Crosbie: What about Greenspan?

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance just waved at me with Mr. Greenspan's remarks. I will wave back with Mr. Smith's report. He is a Tory consultant who says the plan should be changed, revised, and thrown out. We could exchange consultants—they give us back ours, we give them back theirs, and it is an even trade. The fact is that their consultant says their program does not make sense, that it is too expensive, and that it is bad economics. I suggest they read their own consultant's report and stop reading Mr. Greenspan's. They should read the people they are giving money to, who give the same advice.

We should set the tone of this debate right now, Mr. Speaker. If the Minister of Finance thinks he is going to have a short, two-day stay here, I would suggest to him that he had better extend his reservations.