

Housing Task Force Report

Murphy's law: If something can go wrong, it will. The minister or one of his staff obviously supplied *Time* magazine with an advance copy of the report, presumably for publication on the anticipated day of release. Unfortunately for the rights and privileges of parliament, his cold could not stop the presses of *Time* magazine. Unfortunately, also, for the members of the press gallery, who do not like to see ministers giving pet privileges, the leak to *Time* was a "Luce" practice.

The chief failure of the report, a failure which may undo much of the minister's hard work, arises from its attitude toward the provinces, and provincial involvement. The task force, I suggest, would have been better informed, and its report would have been better received, if the studies had involved more provincial consultation and if the task force had better reflected all three levels of government.

One of the main recommendations calls for direct federal-municipal dealings. There are no references to provincial housing corporations although these were, after all, established to deal with problems which may be unique to their provinces and municipalities.

The second area of weakness concerned the attitude toward interest rates. In this respect the report is very weak indeed.

In the suggestions there is more hope than realism. Under no circumstances should the government allow the ceiling to be removed from interest rates for housing until there is an adequate supply of money available, so that there can be a firm assurance that rates will drop—not "may be expected to drop", but will drop.

We have been stung too often in the House of Commons on the matter of interest rates. So far the government has shown no indication to do its part to restore the economy to the point where interest rates may be held at an acceptable level, other than paying a minimum amount of lip service.

The third area of weakness is the failure to come up with a better program of housing for rural Canada.

Recommendation No. 30 is that C.M.H.C. should exercise particular care to ensure that rural areas have adequate mortgage funds. This is simply a pious declaration. What is needed is a whole new approach by C.M.H.C. to the regulations it imposes for construction in rural Canada.

Members of my party are pleased with the suggestions for the land bank assembly, the elimination of the 11 per cent sales tax on building materials, the proposed setting up of

[Mr. McCleave.]

a department of housing and urban affairs, and with the suggested use of existing housing stock for public housing purposes. These are good Conservative policies which we have consistently advocated. I suppose that it is only human if I point out to the Prime Minister, (Mr. Trudeau), to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson), and to other members of the Liberal party that they have attacked us over and over again, charging us with irresponsibility in some of these proposals. Now that they have found respectability on the government side in the Minister of Transport (Mr. Hellyer), I hope that members there will support their minister. We certainly will in these four areas.

I am pleased with the suggestion in the report that there will be worth-while measures to bring housing within the reach of the lower income groups, and I am also pleased with the special program for Indians, Eskimos and Métis people. Our one man task force, Mr. Heward Grafftey, has pointed out graphically to members of my party that there are shacks in northern Canada housing as many as 13 Indians. The conscience of Canadians will surely support the minister in an all-out attack on this kind of injustice.

I would like to note briefly in passing that the task force was apparently never told that land developers do in fact pay income tax on their operations. The task force recommendations in this area are therefore suspect for creating a bogey that in large measure does not exist. It is however a popular bogey.

Finally, I should like to make two suggestions. The first is that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) change his position of not presenting a budget this spring and bring one in immediately, or at least bring in a measure to eliminate the 11 per cent sales tax on building materials. I make a special plea to both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance in this regard.

Second, I would suggest that the subject matter of the report be immediately sent to a committee of the house for study so that this house will be in a position to act at quick speed when the minister is ready with his legislation. In that respect we wish him well, and we hope he will be able to get it before us soon.

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, the report of the task force on housing and urban development constitutes a colossal fraud on the Canadian public.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.