

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

A few days ago I asked the Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson), who is in charge of housing, how close we would come this year to meeting the target suggested by Dr. Deutsch. The minister replied that we were now building homes at the annual rate of 170,000. It was only when the leader of the New Democratic Party asked a supplementary question as to how many houses it was expected would be completed this year that the minister admitted that the number of houses completed this year would be between 150,000 and 155,000; in other words, between 15,000 and 20,000 less than Dr. Deutsch said we needed.

This is not a new situation. In early March, Central Mortgage and Housing reported that housing starts had sagged by 38½ per cent. They said that in the month of January the number of single, detached dwellings started had dropped by 38.5 per cent compared with the same period last year; that apartment starts in January had decreased by 17 per cent; that row housing had decreased by the fantastic amount of 78 per cent. Of course the minister has been telling us that things are getting better, but the *Toronto Telegram* reported on April 15 last that housing starts in Toronto in the month of March went down by 33 per cent compared with the year before. It is not surprising, then, that one reads the kind of report which appeared in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on March 14 last, which says:

Half the families in greater Winnipeg are living in houses or apartments that are overcrowded, or substandard from the point of view of construction or sanitation.

Or else they are living doubled up—two families in a dwelling designed to be used by one family; or they are paying more for their shelter than they can afford.

This article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* goes on to illustrate the tremendous shortages in housing which have arisen. The Minister of Labour has been so busy with labour problems that he has had little time, if any, to devote to housing. The minister was responsible, for example, for the increase in the interest rate being charged on houses. This policy was intended to enable more houses to be purchased, but it ignored completely the fact that the increase in the interest rate has increased the cost of housing. For example, a house selling for between \$20,000 and \$25,000 will cost the purchaser, over 25 years, an additional \$2,000. The result is that it is becoming increasingly impossible for people, not only in the low income bracket but in the middle income bracket, to purchase houses.

When one looks at the statistics published in the annual report of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, he sees that the number of houses purchased by people with an income of up to \$7,000—and the vast majority of people in this country do not earn \$7,000 a year—amounts to only 20 per cent of the total number of houses purchased through N.H.A. financing.

What is required is a government and a minister who realize that housing is important, that it is not something which can be turned on and off like a tap simply because we need or do not need jobs. What is required is a housing policy which has an objective of building houses for the people who need them. I hope the government will agree shortly to the proposal which has come from all sections of the country and from all groups interested in the needs for housing, namely that we have a minister of urban affairs, one of whose major concerns would be the provision of adequate housing for the people of Canada. I would hope that such a minister would get on with the job of providing public housing apartments, row and low rental housing which the ordinary people of this country can afford.

In every city of this country it is easy to rent an apartment if you are prepared to pay \$200 or more a month. But for the ordinary people who earn \$60 or \$70 a week this kind of rent is completely impossible. For them the minister and the government have done virtually nothing. We need to get on with the job of urban renewal.

There was nothing more depressing for me than to attend the conference on housing called by the minister, held in my city of Winnipeg, and to hear the minister excuse the fact that he has done so little in housing by saying that of course we cannot expect the moneyed people of this country to put their money into housing when they could make more money building factories and high rise office buildings on which they could charge a very substantial rate and make much greater profits. That is the kind of program which has led to disaster, up to now.

Mr. B. S. Mackasey (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I listened with a great deal of interest to the remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg North. I think he will agree with me that the problem of housing is world-wide. Let me point out that in the great socialist haven of Sweden one has to wait six years if he is