

*The Address—Mr. Thatcher*

this country. Many young Canadian couples got married. The Minister of Reconstruction and Supply (Mr. Winters) said today that he hoped 100,000 homes would be built this year. More than that number of couples in Canada were married during the past year.

I say therefore, Mr. Speaker, that far from catching up with the backlog of housing, we are going behind. I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that, so far as housing is concerned, we are in a worse position today than we were in 1945, and yet the minister comes in with a proposal such as the one he made today. Whether we like to admit it or not, in many of our urban centres, slums, overcrowding, evictions and frustrated lives are ever more prevalent. I think that is true even in some parts of Ottawa. I ask any hon. member of this house whether it is reasonable that in a country where there is so much lumber and so much brick and mortar, so many hundreds of thousands should be without homes. What has the government promised in this respect?

I remember hearing speakers from the Liberal party say, back in 1945, that every veteran was entitled to a good home. I heard them say that under the National Housing Act houses would be available to Canadians for as low as \$9.58 per month. In this recent election campaign the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) himself made a radio speech on March 19 in which he said:

We are not going to be satisfied until decent housing is provided for every family.

Then the minister of reconstruction (Mr. Winters) brings in a scheme like the one he brought in today!

The speech from the throne contained only casual reference to housing. It stated that the scope of the National Housing Act will be broadened. A few weeks ago the minister of reconstruction made a trip across Canada, as he put it, to study the housing problem. He talked with the various provincial authorities and I congratulate him on the initiative he showed in taking that trip. But what were his conclusions? What was his solution? Are we to take it that what he offered us today is his solution to the housing problem? I do not think the minister himself would be so naive. Here is a report of what he said in Regina, the capital of my province. I quote from the *Regina Leader-Post* of August 23:

As yet there has been no definite solution to the housing problem but the federal government was not looking for any such solution immediately, he maintained.

Mr. Speaker, was there ever made by any cabinet minister a franker admission of government inaction in the face of a pressing problem? Then the minister of reconstruc-

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tion is quoted in this manner in the same interview:

The housing picture in Canada has not deteriorated during the past year . . . The housing situation held its own in Canada during the first half of 1949 and will probably continue to do so in the last half.

Is that not imagination? Is that not boldness? How gratifying to the people of Canada who have been living in one or two rooms maybe since 1945, how gratifying to the veterans who have come back from the war to live perhaps in some kind of hovel, to know that the housing problem is no worse this year than it was last year? What kind of solution is that, Mr. Speaker?

Then the minister of reconstruction went on and said, "After all, this matter of housing is constitutionally a provincial problem; it is really not our concern." I do not think there is one syllable in the constitution which would prevent the federal government from giving large-scale financial aid to the provinces or to the municipalities in order to finance subsidized low-rental housing, in the same manner as they have done with unemployment insurance and with old age pensions. This afternoon again I heard the minister say something about the constitution and the problem being the provinces' responsibility. But I say that the time has come in Canada when the government can no longer shirk its responsibilities on housing by mumbling legal incantations, by talking about the constitutional difficulties involved under the British North America Act, and by chattering about what some other government should do. Of course there is only one answer to the housing problem, and that is not the answer which, unfortunately, the minister gave us this afternoon.

The minister's statement is no solution at all to the housing problem, and I think every hon. member in this house realizes that. I think it is going to cause bitter disappointment in the country. The minister stated that the problem was acute. He told why it was acute. He admitted that there is a great shortage of housing. Then he went on to state that now is not the time to proceed with a large-scale housing project. Why is it not the time? When is it going to be the time? The main proposal made by the minister, if I understood him correctly, was that there would be a reduction in the down payment made on houses in certain housing projects. That means a lower initial payment. I think that is all right, but that is no solution, because it will simply mean a higher annual carrying charge and it is no relief for the average worker, who is too poor to make even that lower initial payment.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the minister