

Housing

● (8:30 p.m.)

These are four things that have happened in the housing field since the Minister of Transport was appointed to head the task force and made responsible for Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. No wonder the story reeks of frustration. There are other factors, of course. The government ignored his task force report and the suggestion going to the core of the problem, the one to do with setting up a department of urban affairs. All those recommendations were met with a blunt no. When the hon. member for Broadview (Mr. Gilbert) asked in this chamber whether the 11 per cent sales tax on building materials was to be removed, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) dismissed the idea in a cavalier manner. He also did that the other day, almost out of contempt for the ideas of the outgoing Minister of Transport.

On looking through the transcript of the press conference one finds that the minister considered most important the idea of making loans to municipalities, with the concurrence of the provinces, of course, so they could buy serviced land. The idea was to buy time with the constitutional purists of the cabinet, but that did him little good. He considered that such a policy was most likely to succeed and was the most practical policy. In the transcript he is reported as saying, in part:

The reason I feel that is very important is because it is the only way that I know that you can get the cost of housing down quickly. Well, I shouldn't say the only way—the most practical way, the thing that is most likely to succeed in the short run, and consequently I put considerable importance on it because I think the cost of housing could be reduced by say \$1,000 to \$2,000 per unit for all houses built in Canada in perpetuity, by aggressively pursuing this policy.

There, he was speaking of something that was at the heart of the recommendations contained in the report of the task force. That was all whistled aside because of a constitutional position about which many of us have serious doubts. No wonder the minister could take it no longer and simply backed out.

Years ago, in the 1920's and 1930's, one of the great English judges on the judicial committee of the Privy Council looked at the Canadian constitution and treated it with what lawyers call the living tree approach. That is, the constitution was not the bare

bones of something put together in 1867 but was a growing and useful instrument which took into account precedents arising from dominion-provincial developments over the years following the enactment of the British North America Act. I think the living tree philosophy for a constitution is sound. I suggest that the Prime Minister has taken the living tree of our constitution and vigorously pruned many of the new limbs. Has the man never heard of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation?

Mr. Bell: I doubt it.

Mr. McCleave: Why, if the Prime Minister's philosophy had held sway in previous years the National Housing Act would never have become reality. Have not the National Housing Act and Central Housing and Mortgage Corporation become great instruments for the development of Canada?

Again I say that the Prime Minister has taken the living tree of our constitution, knocked off all kinds of branches and turned it, or tried to turn it, into dead wood.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): Order, please. Pursuant to Section 13 of Standing Order 26 I am satisfied that the debate has been concluded. I, therefore, declare the motion carried.

Mr. Bell: Mr. Speaker, is there anything particular for Monday, if the government can look that far ahead?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Business will be as announced yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): Order, please. Before adjourning I think we ought to extend our thanks to the staff and to the officers of the house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): And to many who have contributed as much as those who spoke in the debate.

This house stands adjourned until Monday, at 2 o'clock p.m. I hope you all have a happy weekend.

At 8.40 p.m. the house adjourned, without question put, pursuant to standing order.