

*National Housing Act*

at the conclusion of world war II. The Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) had something to say on this subject. He said:

Adequate housing for the Canadian people is one of the major tasks before us. The utmost effort will be directed towards meeting this need and the resources of the country will be used to this end . . .

I do not feel it is necessary to read all of what he said, but there is a very pertinent sentence further on which reads as follows:

We believe that houses should be constructed commensurate with the high standard of living at which we are aiming.

There is the Minister of Trade and Commerce suggesting the very thing in 1945 that we are saying today. There is nothing inconsistent in our desire for adequate housing in this country; and when the suggestion is made that there is a lack of reality in a policy which aims at adequate housing for Canadian citizens it seems to me that the government has come a long way downward since 1945. The Minister of Trade and Commerce went on to say:

This will involve new houses for families with low income who cannot afford to pay economic rentals.

That is the Minister of Trade and Commerce speaking in 1945. In an article appearing in *Public Affairs* of October, 1947, the Minister of Trade and Commerce had this to say along the same line:

The dominion government recognizes the need of adequate housing as Canada's most pressing social problem and one of the most serious of all public problems.

Further on he points out:

In the absence of agreement on dominion-provincial relations made at that time, the provisions made in the National Housing Act, 1944, respecting low rent housing, subsidization of such housing and slum clearance have been allowed to stand unchanged. The hard core of the problem, low rent housing, has been barely touched.

These are the words of the Minister of Trade and Commerce. Here was the broad objective of the government. It was to be the aim of the National Housing Act to accomplish certain purposes. Oh, what a change has taken place in the government thinking since that time. Of course it is like a lot of other things. In 1945 we had other commitments and promises made by members of the government. We were going to have a health scheme. We were going to have provisions for full employment. A great many things were promised the Canadian people at that time, but apparently housing and many of these other worth-while and forward-looking proposals made by the federal government at that time have fallen by the wayside.

They were made at a time when I believe the government were a little leery. They had lost a number of by-elections and had not fared too well at the polls. I think perhaps the political situation at the time, certainly the political climate of the country, more or less thrust upon the government the importance of at least making a stab at promising worth-while policies. The Minister of Public Works makes light of the suggestion that after all it is not beyond the realm of possibility to have a housing program that will provide homes for Canadian citizens. I say that the government has certainly changed its attitude on this matter within recent years. I suggest that the minister and the other members of the government should go back over the statements made a few years ago and reconsider their present stand on many of these matters.

The legislation now brought forward will, as the hon. member for Eglinton pointed out, accomplish some useful purpose so far as it goes, but we are faced with the same old problem. Here is a job which needs to be done. However, the government will just go so far, and judging from past performances with respect to legislation we have not here the type of legislation we should have.

At the outset I said there were two aspects to the housing problem, the question of construction and the question of the replacement of dwellings which are unfit for human habitation. What has been done? The minister boasts of the number of starts and the number of completions last year. All right; we will grant that the Canadian construction industry had a banner year and that so far as those who are in the market to buy houses are concerned a great deal was accomplished last year. But the central problem which we have to come back to time and time again has not been faced up to, the question of the provision of housing for the people in Canada—and they constitute a great mass of our population—who are on incomes which will not permit them to purchase homes under part I of the National Housing Act.

This has been brought to the attention of the government a number of times. It has been pointed out that under part I of the National Housing Act there is no chance whatever for a vast number of Canadian citizens who are working steadily, have more or less permanent employment, but whose earnings are not sufficiently high, to purchase a home under the act. I suggest that the minister owes it to members of the house to state the position of the government in this matter. Does he feel that the government has no responsibility toward people on low incomes?