

HOUSING

EFFECT OF INFLATION ON INDUSTRY AND HOME OWNERS

Mr. Chuck Cook (North Vancouver-Burnaby): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Public Works, the minister responsible for the housing crisis in the country. Inflation is now at 12.2 per cent, and with its accompanying ballooning of mortgage interest rates, obviously is causing severe financial distress and wreaking havoc with Canadians holding mortgages which must be renewed, and with the housing industry.

Will the minister confirm that the Canadian housing industry, on a yearly basis, is in the deepest slump since the 1930s? Will he agree that the inflation created by government deficits and oceans of new money being printed to cope with this deficit are the major cause of the housing disaster facing Canada?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, in so far as my ministry responds to the part of the question dealing with the condition of the housing industry in Canada, I might say that about a year ago some of the statistics might have been approximately accurate, that is, the slump of the industry and the difficulties of the industry. But I am sure the hon. member and many hon. members have seen in recent months, particularly in the first quarter of this year, improvement in the industry, as reflected by the increase in the number of starts. Indeed, according to industry spokesmen—I am thinking of the urban development industry and, for example, the HUDAC spokesman; leaders in the industry—obviously the record of the first quarter of this year shows an improvement in the industry and optimism in the industry which was not apparent, as I have indicated, 12 months previously.

Mr. Cook: Madam Speaker, in an effort to be sweetly reasonable—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cook:—what new policy does the minister have to fight inflation as the main obstacle to expanding and building more houses? Will the minister try to persuade the government to get off its constitutional obsession, so that we can deal with both inflation and the housing problems?

Mr. Cosgrove: Madam Speaker, with some modesty, I might say that sweet reasonableness is one of the attributes I attempt to project and to apply to all my duties and responsibilities.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Cosgrove: I would think anyone applying those standards in any objective manner would have to agree that the signals in the industry are to an upturn, there is optimism in the industry and, in part, that reflects the previous action of the government in the last 12 months, for example, in increasing social housing starts, in the budget provisions with respect

Point of Order—Mr. Clark

to MURBs, and in the better use of government machinery under the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to be a more effective provider vis-à-vis the housing needs of Canadians generally.

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POINTS OF ORDER

MR. CLARK—THE CONSTITUTION—SUGGESTED PROCEDURE FOR AMENDING PROPOSED RESOLUTION

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order concerning House business and flowing from the fraternal discussions between the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) and the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). I want a little clarification on what exactly the Prime Minister indicated he would find acceptable, particularly since it was not clear to me in the statement of the Leader of the New Democratic Party whether or not he was talking about votes on amendments in the House prior to any package going to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Broadbent: Yes.

Mr. Clark: He now says, "Yes". To come back to the proposition I raised yesterday which caused discussions among House leaders that have now been carried on publicly—I must say it was somewhat to our surprise that those discussions should be carried on publicly on the floor of the House, but that process having been started, we will carry it on—let me ask the Prime Minister whether he would be prepared to accept a position which contained the following elements. First, there would be a grouping of a limited number of amendments agreed to among all parties in the House. Second, that the constitutionality of those amendments, as well as the constitutionality of the government's own resolution, would be determined by the Supreme Court of Canada before Parliament votes on any question relating to the constitutional resolution.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: Third, that the debate in Parliament be adjourned until a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada to allow Parliament to get on with the other urgent business of the nation. Fourth, that no new amendments would be introduced to any resolution after the Supreme Court of Canada has rendered its decision on the legality of the government's position and on the legality of any amendments which might be proposed by other parties in the House.

Would the Prime Minister be prepared to respond positively to a proposal containing those elements?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, this is a rather strange point of order. It began with asking me to clarify the suggestion of the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) that I accepted. I can only