

*The Address—Mrs. G. MacInnis*

I may add that they are a disgrace to the country in which they reside and to the government which is charged with looking after the needs of these people. I see no cause for complacency. I know the minister is deeply concerned about this problem, but I see no reason why he should be complacent about it or mislead people to believe that the problem is under control. It is very far from being under control today. The situation is infinitely more serious than it was when the minister pronounced those words two years ago.

One does not have to take my word for this or the word of housing people or social welfare workers. The joint Senate and House of Commons committee on consumer credit and the cost of living has just tabled a report in which the committee used these words,—and I want to emphasize them:

Your committee feels that there is an overwhelming need for a national housing plan based on the premise that every Canadian deserves a decent place to live in. Good intentions in this field have abounded but progress has been unsatisfactory... After hearing testimony on the subject your committee concludes that housing has been a neglected poor relation for far too long.

The report ends by recommending that the federal government assign a higher priority to the problem of housing in Canada than is the case at the present time. We must remember that this was an all-party committee composed of members of the Senate and the House of Commons. It was the considered opinion of that committee, after taking testimony across this country, that for far too long housing has had a low priority on the government's agenda. The committee urged that it be given that low place no longer, that it no longer be considered a poor relation. Probably the minister hit the nail on the head this afternoon when he said the mistake had been that we had been too busy with other things. I sincerely believe that has been the case, and that these other things were not half as important as the question of housing.

● (8:10 p.m.)

I turn now to that part of the speech which deals with the government's intention to set up a department of corporate and consumer affairs. I would recall to the house that the establishment of a department of consumer affairs has been demanded for years. It was first of all demanded by the Canadian Association of Consumers, now known as the Consumers Association of Canada. In the last three sessions this demand has been put forward in the house, first by the hon. member

for Danforth (Mr. Scott), then by the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond (Mr. Prittie), and last session by myself.

It was not until food prices had risen to twice the level of other items in the cost of living index that anything was done by this government to deal with food prices. In the comfortable insulation of this chamber we find it very difficult to realize just how these boycotters and protesters felt as week after week and day after day they watched the price of food creep upwards in our supermarkets, with the knowledge that the portion of their income which was left after food bills had been paid was shrinking in proportion to the increase in food prices. It was not until the boycotters and protesters from coast to coast rose up and took action that this government referred the matter of the cost of living to the committee on consumer credit.

I now want to recount briefly a few of the things that have happened since then. Let me say very bluntly that the major recommendation made by the committee was for the creation of a department of consumer affairs with a full time minister in charge. The government has given notice in the speech from the throne that it is going to thumb its nose at our major recommendation, that it is going to thumb its nose at the committee. Because instead of saying that the government is going to put forward legislation to establish a department of consumer affairs, the speech reveals that the government is going to establish a department of corporate and consumer affairs.

In the committee we made it perfectly clear, in the first instance in our recommendation last Christmas and in our later report, that what is needed in Canada is a department the sole purpose of which is to protect consumers. We recommend that we should gather together the bits and pieces of consumer protection which are scattered throughout various government departments and bring them together into a single department, the sole purpose of which would be to protect the consumer.

This point was made by every organization which spoke on the subject as we travelled across Canada. Not one single organization asked for a department of corporate and consumer affairs. Neither was there a single organization which asked to have consumer affairs dumped with any other affairs into one government department. This was to be something new. At long last we had risen to the point where we hoped this government would be ready to establish a department to look