

National Housing Act

Mr. Gilbert: On April 25 of this year, the Prime Minister said in this house that there was no housing crisis in Canada. Yet today the Minister said we have a housing crisis. Then, he indulged in semantics and said, "You know, there is a difference between a housing crisis and a housing problem". He indulged in a word marathon—if one may call it that—and one must assume that C.M.H.C. economists advised him about aspects of the housing problem. Nevertheless, his argument was that there is a distinction between a housing crisis and a housing problem.

The Prime Minister displayed a callous and arrogant attitude on April 25 when he spoke about housing. Having been to Camden in the Maritimes and seen the deplorable housing conditions there and having had tomatoes thrown at him in the west, the Prime Minister may have said to the Minister without Portfolio in charge of housing, "You know, you had better say there is a housing crisis, but you could perhaps indulge in a little semantic word play and say there is a difference between a housing crisis and a housing problem".

The N.D.P. party says there is a housing crisis, and that view is shared by most Canadians. But why do we say this, Mr. Speaker? We say it because there is a shortage of housing stock and because houses are very expensive. I hesitate to repeat figures, but I must repeat them if I am to persuade the government that there is a shortage of housing in Canada.

The report of the task force on housing indicated that there are 5.5 million housing units in Canada and that there are 5.7 million family and non-family housing users. On the face of it, therefore, we have a shortage of 200,000 homes. The report said that of these 5.5 million houses, 500,000 are in sub-standard condition. Also, 400,000 families are doubling up and 100,000 people are on waiting lists for public housing across this country. I am prepared at this stage to accept the findings of the Economic Council of Canada and of the task force on housing. Clearly, 200,000 homes must be found.

Let us examine what housing units have been built in the past. In 1966 I note that 134,000 units are listed as being built; in 1967 that figure increases to 164,000 units and, in 1968, to 196,000 units. Yet I note that these are housing starts. When one examines the number of houses completed, one sees a slightly different picture. I am talking about homes which are ready for occupancy. We

find that in 1967, 149,242 units were completed; the completion figure for 1968 rose to 170,993 units. I emphasize that these latter figures are for housing units which have been completed.

Let us examine the types of homes that were built in 1968. Of 196,878 homes begun in that year, 111,425 consisted of apartments or row housing units, only 85,453 being single family, semi-detached or duplex accommodations. As the president of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation indicated in his annual report, this is the first year in which construction of private dwellings has accounted for less than half of total housing starts. Is it any wonder it was necessary to have \$170 million for construction of detached and condominium units in September of last year?

● (4:50 p.m.)

I remind the minister in charge of housing of the brief presented by the Co-operative Union of Canada wherein they stated the broad outline for mixed housing should be 65 per cent residential single family homes and apartments, 10 per cent to 20 per cent public housing and 15 per cent co-operative housing. In 1968, 98.5 per cent of all homes were residential, 1 per cent public housing and I think I am being generous when I say .5 per cent was co-operative housing. This is the problem which faced the former minister when he presented his estimates to the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare. There is nothing in this bill which will correct the imbalance of housing.

We in this party say there is a housing crisis in Canada not only because there is a shortage of housing, but because of the high cost of housing, land costs, mortgage financing, interest rates and the material costs. I wish to deal with these separately. Very little of the material costs are accounted for in the sharp increase in home costs. Production methods have absorbed much of the increased labour costs.

When the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) refused to remove the 11 per cent sales tax, this indicated he wished to retain this financial instrument. We in this party said at that time if the tax were not removed it should be applied as part of the down payment on a home valued to \$25,000. The increase in the cost of labour and material has not been the major component with regard to the high cost of housing. It is the second phase of mortgage financing, as the President of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation has said,