

600,000 Houses Since War

Favourable economic conditions together with the large increase in the population and even larger proportionate increase which has taken place in the number of families, as well as the rapidity of this growth itself, have brought a number of problems, not the least of which is the supply of new housing. You might well ask me the question - what success has attended our efforts in meeting this problem? Since the end of the war the house-building industry, aided by municipalities, provinces and in large measure by the Federal Government, has seen to the erection of some 600,000 new housing units. Although all of us would like to have seen more housing, nevertheless I think that in light of all circumstances, a good job is being done. Argument may be made that the number of houses is not enough, but it is certainly the case that the number which has been built has put a strain upon the resources required to achieve and maintain a high level of house building. During the early post-war years, and occasionally since then, building materials and in some places labour, were in short supply. This situation is now somewhat easier and it's probably the case that materials and labour are not as important a limitation as they were.

But probably a more important question than how we have done, is, how we are presently doing? It will be recalled that, in the years immediately following the war, the increase in the number of new residential units progressively increased until, in the years 1948 to 1950, there was an annual average of some 91,200 starts. Then as a result of Korea and the necessity of turning the nation's resources to the defence effort, there was a sharp decline in the number of housing starts, which dropped to some 68,600 in 1951.

Although the volume of new housing turned down because of an immediate diversion of resources for the defence effort, the building industry quickly adjusted itself and as soon as conditions permitted a greater supply of housing was being produced than had been possible immediately after the outbreak of war in Korea. By the middle of 1952 the tempo of new starts had increased and during the last half of the year new residential starts were in excess of the 1950 rate of about 91,000 units a year. I emphasize the word "rate" for the period because I do not wish this statement to be misinterpreted that the starts in 1952 were that number.

Buoyancy Likely to Continue

There is good reason to believe that this buoyancy in new housing starts may well continue into 1953. Labour and materials are available, mortgage financing is in reasonably good supply, and there appears a strong effective demand from prospective home owners and renters. One unfavourable feature, which varies as between communities, is the difficulty which may exist in the municipalities being able to supply sufficient serviced land for a large volume of new housing. I understand that this has not been as acute a problem in Greater Winnipeg as it has in Toronto and other communities, but that availability of serviced land here is becoming a matter of interest and concern.