

*Housing*

British Columbia accounts for most of the soft wood plywood made in Canada. Let me relate a few of these facts to the declining housing starts to show the impact the housing crisis has on this very important industry. I should like to refer to the B.C. Summary of Economic Activity 1974.

B.C.'s forest industry experienced a serious decline in the lumber component during 1974 after having enjoyed three successive years of expanding markets and good prices. Demand instability for wood products began in the first quarter of 1974 and price reductions became evident near the end of the second quarter. The reduced demand for lumber and plywood necessitated some cutbacks and lay-offs in the wood products sector during the last quarter. What was the reason given for the drastic decline in the lumber component in 1974? The major reason given is the decline in housing starts.

The summary goes on to say:

It is anticipated that no significant improvement in market conditions can be expected until mid 1975 even if dramatic measures are taken immediately to get housing construction back on an upward trend.

I should like to draw attention to the serious and drastic situation that will develop in view of the fact that there is a continuing decline in housing starts in Canada. The quantity of lumber scaled in British Columbia declined in 1974 by 21 per cent from the previous year, again due to the weakened housing market.

I could go on to deal with the various aspects of the lumber industry in British Columbia, to point out in an additional manner the way in which the drastic housing situation is affecting this province, but because of the shortage of time and because other members wish to speak I will delete some of the issues and shorten some of the others I had intended to cover rather fully.

British Columbia is a province that has been able to manage its forest products to provide employment for its citizens through the extraction sector as well as the related manufacturing and processing sector. But this industry which, as I have tried to point out, is so vital to British Columbia is also very dependent on the residential construction industry in Canada. The past year has been an extremely difficult one because of the inept policies followed by the federal government.

I do not know how many times I have heard the minister and other members of the government state that Canadians are well housed. This has been said on a number of occasions. I believe it would take more than the flowery words of the minister in charge of housing, or of any of his supporters on the other side of the House, to convince us that that is the case, because wherever one travels in this country one finds serious housing situations that are developing and which have developed not only in one category but across the board.

I believe it is time the government paid attention to this matter, and instead of doing so much talking took some action, because no matter how many statements are made and how many programs are in effect this does not mean that the problem is being effectively tackled. There is a vast difference between intentions and actual performance. I am sure we have all heard the statement that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and not only

the road to hell but the road to some far more desirable objectives is paved with good intentions. I do not question the intentions of the minister or his desire to meet the needs in the housing field, but I do question, as do other members of our party, the actual performance of the minister in carrying to fruition the plan he has announced so many times in this House.

I see that time is rapidly passing by. I should like to point out some of the obstacles in the way of an adequate and effective program to achieve the goal of decent housing at reasonable cost for Canadians. I shall cover these rather quickly. I think we start with the fundamental problem of inflation.

Throughout the budget debates over the past several years the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) indicated time and time again that the major thrust of his budgets was to combat two problems, unemployment and inflation. But we find that the more often he emphasizes this the less progress is made in meeting the challenge and the need to solve the inflationary problem. I believe the government has reached the point at which it has just given up on this proposition.

Despite the fact that during the past few months the government has been carrying on consensus discussions it has not been able to record one single shred of evidence to indicate it is being successful in its consensus program in order to meet the problem of inflation. So I say I believe the government has given up. Perhaps that is one reason for the delay in bringing in the budget as has been announced. The reason given is that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) will be away. How much longer is Canada to be last on the list of priorities? So many times when there has been a debate in this House on a very important issue the Prime Minister has had to be away when he should have been in this House presenting propositions, meeting the challenges of the opposition, and answering questions.

Instead of being here the Prime Minister opts for something else. During the last several months, and over two or three years this pattern I have mentioned has been emerging. I believe it is time that the Prime Minister and other ministers got down to the business of administering their particular departments in a way that will not only give them direction but also indicate to the people of the country that they are actually doing something worthwhile for the benefit of the nation.

The second obstacle is the high and increasing interest rates. It is not necessary for me to go into this because it has been discussed quite fully in the debate thus far. I would point out, however, that in spite of the fact that there has been so much emphasis on interest rates continuing to rise, the government has taken absolutely no steps to ensure that people will be able to obtain mortgage money in order to build their own homes. There is no tax relief insofar as this is concerned.

Suggestions have been made concerning how the interest rate above a certain percentage should be tax deductible. But the government has consistently refused to accept the proposition. I believe that this is one area in which a real contribution could be made on behalf of those who are earnestly endeavouring to secure adequate housing.

[Mr. Patterson.]