

National Housing Act

much more in view of the extent to which measures of this kind await the exercise of municipal initiative.

Therefore I say in conclusion that while all members of the house will cheer the extent to which the home builders of this country have achieved records within the last couple of years, we find it necessary to warn the government that this is not the time to be smug; this is not the time to rest upon our oars; we are far from having solved the housing problems of this country. Demand is keeping up with supply, even at the increased rate of construction. In the statistical study I mentioned earlier, Canadian Housing Statistics for the fourth quarter of 1955, issued by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, we find on page 5 this statement:

The demand for new dwellings kept pace with the supply.

That was a record supply; yet demand kept pace with it. A tremendous volume of home construction is going to be required in the years ahead of us to keep pace with the increase in the Canadian population and the development of the Canadian economy. Let us never regard this as a problem that admits of a static approach. What is required on the part of all levels of government, and not least of all on the part of the federal government, as we must make it our business to remind them, is a dynamic approach to a challenging national problem.

Mr. Claude Ellis (Regina City): In the resolution stage the problem as we see it was set forth, and it was suggested that in studying the bill we would have to judge it in the light of its ability to meet the situation in Canada in so far as housing is concerned. I must say that, whilst there are commendable features in the legislation, the government has not indicated through this bill that it is taking the type of action which present conditions warrant.

I note that when the original National Housing Act was passed it was in its broad outlines an act to promote the construction of new houses, the repair and modernization of existing houses, and the improvement of housing and living conditions. Since the time the first act was passed it has been possible for us to look at the situation in Canada and determine the effectiveness of the National Housing Act in dealing with Canada's housing problem.

First of all we have to consider that there are two aspects of the housing problem, as we might describe it. First there is the question of meeting the demand for new houses, that is, the aspect of constructing houses. Second there is the housing problem in so far as health standards are concerned,

[Mr. Fleming.]

that is, the removal of obsolescent houses and houses that do not measure up to community health standards.

I think the minister on a number of occasions has taken considerable pride in the fact that there has been stepped-up activity in home construction during the past year. He referred on Monday last to the number of starts made last year, and suggested that we are now making inroads into the backlog of housing, but in making that statement he is, of course, very conveniently overlooking vast areas of Canada's housing needs which have not been touched up to the present time. I asked him a question with regard to the government policy, as to whether the government felt that the way to solve the housing needs of people of low income is to build more expensive houses and let the people on low incomes take the hand-me-down dwellings. The minister suggested that it was not government policy to provide a new house for everybody in Canada.

I believe the minister has made a number of references to demands of members in this group that we undertake a large-scale housing program in Canada. He has suggested that we are impractical, that we are being too idealistic, but I want to remind the minister that there have been many authorities in this and other countries who, upon examination of the housing problem, have made suggestions quite similar. As a matter of fact the white paper on housing in Great Britain in March of 1945—and I suggest that these people were not being too impractical—set out three objectives in their housing policy. It said:

The government's first objective is to afford a separate dwelling for every family which desires to have one. For this purpose it is estimated that some three quarters of a million dwellings are needed.

The second objective is to provide for the rapid completion of the slum clearance and overcrowding programs which were already in course of execution before the war. To remove houses already condemned as unfit and to abate overcrowding condemned since 1935, a further half million houses are needed.

The long-term objective of the government is to secure a progressive improvement in the conditions of housing in respect both of standards of accommodation and of equipment, and to attain this objective by a continuous program of new building. This continuous program must include provision year by year for any increase in the number of separate families, the needs which arise out of redistribution of the population, and the replacement of obsolescent houses.

We have been urging upon the minister a policy much in line with the United Kingdom white paper on housing issued in 1945. We need not go to Britain. One need only consider remarks by members of this government