

Supply—Labour

The minister asked us to do two things, to be critical and to try in some small measure to be constructive. Of course, as good members of the opposition we are always interested in being constructive. The real problem in housing today in Canada as I see it is that no level of government will be honest enough with the public to admit that a housing crisis exists, though it is apparent everywhere. You cannot travel throughout this country without seeing the critical situation of housing. In my opinion it is the most urgent social problem we are faced with. The shortage is not confined to places like Toronto; it is present in rural areas and in small towns. It is a problem which exists across this country from one ocean to the other. For the minister, therefore, to get up and suggest to us who represent the various areas of this country that there is no problem is fatuous. His whole speech was an exercise in fatuous frolicking. It did not come to grips with the problem.

I wish that for once the government of this country would say: There is a problem and we are prepared to co-operate to try to solve it. Instead, every time that we raise the matter the minister gets up with a whole batch of statistics to floor us with his rhetoric and say, "There is no problem. It is a kind of isolated thing which, if we close our eyes, may some day go away." That is all he told us today. We simply will not solve the housing crisis in this country unless this government and other governments are prepared to say: We admit there is a problem.

We are not saying that the federal government is wholly to blame. This problem has arisen since the second world war and it is a product of the inattention, lassitude and apathy not just of the federal government but of all the provincial governments and municipal authorities. Everyone must share the blame. But for heaven's sake let us admit that it exists and try to get down to constructive action. Let us try to assess the problem and deal with it. If the government would only do that we should be on our way to some sort of solution. Instead, the minister persists in his fatuous position that there is no problem and that there is only isolated difficulty here and there which can be dealt with by unloading a lot of mortgage money.

The minister talked about private enterprise and said that it could solve the problem. I am not criticizing private enterprise. It goes where the money is. That is its job. But in no country of the world has private enterprise

solved the housing problem of the majority of the people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Scott (Danforth): I do not say that self-righteously. I do not even criticize. It is engaged in business and it goes where the most money is. It has not solved the housing crisis anywhere else and it will not solve it in Canada, despite what the minister says.

My third point is that the minister must stop running around the country hiding behind the British North America Act. The position he constantly takes is: We can do nothing because under the constitution housing is under the authority of the provinces. That attitude is disastrous. Housing is of national concern, no matter under whose jurisdiction it lies. The people in the provincial governments are eager to co-operate with the federal government. They are looking for help, leadership and co-operation. They are not worried about the B.N.A. Act; they are worried about their people.

For the minister constantly to scurry behind the B.N.A. Act every time we talk about housing is reprehensible and unforgivable. Ottawa must begin to accept responsibility. Until it does we can have debates for 30 or 40 hours, we can take days in talking, but unless we are prepared in this chamber to accept responsibility for housing as a matter of national concern, no solution is in sight.

I hope the minister is not expecting a lot of solutions this afternoon. I suggest that no single person in this chamber this afternoon can give a blueprint to solve the housing problem. Let us admit to the public that it is a deep-rooted, far-ranging, difficult problem and that at this stage we do not know the precise answer. But let us say that we will accept responsibility and that we will start to do something concrete. That is what the public wants to hear and not a lot of ridiculous statements about mortgage money and how it will cure a problem which does not exist. Let us tell the public the truth for a change. That would go a long way toward getting co-operation.

We have many problems in the field of housing. I have studied that field since coming to Ottawa and its magnitude and complexity are overwhelming. We are not a unitary government; we must work with the provinces and municipalities. We have the most outdated building codes known to mankind. A whole host of problems must be resolved.