

National Housing Act

by offering them subsidies. All they are doing is passing on subsidies to financial institutions. We do nothing with regard to controlling interest rates. Really, it makes me sick that we have to debate legislation like this bill presented by the government.

The parliamentary secretary wound up by saying that housing is a social commodity. We could not agree more. So are schools, so are hospitals, and so, probably, are churches. If it is a social commodity, housing at reasonable cost should be a basic right of all Canadians. Yet there is nothing in this legislation which would see to it that housing is a social commodity and a basic right at a reasonable cost for all Canadians. I do not like to vote against things, but this is certainly one piece of legislation I shall vote against.

An hon. Member: Surprise, surprise.

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Madam Speaker, the government has finally let us look at what it apparently feels is the answer to the long-standing problem of exorbitant housing costs, astronomical rents and the serious lack of housing starts. I have been waiting patiently for a chance to give my enthusiastic support to the government's housing bill, but now that I have seen it I can only say that my long wait was in vain. This is a motherhood bill, pure and simple. In politics, just about everyone hastens to support motherhood issues, with the possible exception of those who beat the drum for abortion on demand. Believe me, this bill is motherhood in capital letters. The large print in this measure says to us, "Pass this bill and everybody will have a beautiful home, complete with picture-window, and a big, fat mortgage at 13 per cent interest." Instant housing, Madam Speaker!

● (1740)

But when we get to the small print we find that this legislation is chock full of pitfalls, angles and ambiguities. It is a cop-out. It is just another example of what this government has proven it does so well. Give this government a problem to solve, and just as in the case of the anti-inflation boondoggle, they appoint a few Liberal faithful to some high-paying jobs with impressive titles, and turn them loose. Among the first things they do then is to try to dazzle us with outrageous budgets of hundreds of millions of dollars, and try to convince us that they will spend us out of the problem if we will just give them enough time and enough money.

Under this bill the government is going to get private lending institutions to divert \$750 million into the housing market, specifically into lower and moderately-priced homes. Just how do they propose to do this, Madam Speaker? Well, so far they have not told us how they propose to get financial institutions to alter their operations plans, or how they propose to get these institutions to invest in low-yield ventures. We are just told that this is what the government plans to do and it is left at that.

Does the government think that we are so unsophisticated that we will accept this idle statement as government policy? Does the government think that this country's lending institutions are so vulnerable to this type of veiled threat that they are going to rush headlong into the low and moderately-priced housing market? Of course not,

[Mr. Gilbert.]

Madam Speaker. To begin with, this is a free enterprise society, or at least it still bears some resemblance to free enterprise. People in our society invest in ventures that are reasonably secure and provide the highest possible yield. There is nothing wrong with that. After all, this is not government money we are talking about, it is private money and it would be a serious mistake for the government to impose restrictions on where this money can be invested.

We are all familiar with the investment pattern of Canadians in the past. In their search for secure investment opportunities, Canadians have invested heavily in ventures and properties in the United States. At the present time some \$25 billion has been invested in the United States by Canadian investors, some of it not too wisely as the hon. member for Broadview (Mr. Gilbert) said. What is the government going to do if private lending institutions will not divert large blocks of capital to the low-cost housing market, Madam Speaker? Are we going to have legislation spelling out what these institutions can invest in, under pain of having their funds confiscated?

Madam Speaker, what is \$750 million, anyway? As a famous Liberal cabinet minister said a while ago, "What's a million?"—and that was at a time when a million was a hell of a lot more money than it is today. That is about enough to build 20,000 homes, hardly a figure for the government to be shooting at as far as housing starts are concerned. We need hundreds of thousands of starts, not a paltry 20,000. Perhaps the government should have said that private lenders would be asked to divert \$7 billion or \$8 billion into housing funds. Then the genius at the head of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation could just lean back in his chair and let the housing problem solve itself.

This bill ignores the underlying causes of inflation in housing costs by not attempting to deal with the question of serviced land. It has been known for many years that certain builders across the country, especially in urban centres, have gained control of all of the available serviced land, and if another smaller builder wants to build houses he has to buy land from the developer, or small groups of builders, who control the land. We have a classic case of that practice in the Ottawa area. A good friend of the Liberal party, Robert Campeau, is said to own 9,000 acres of land in the Ottawa-Hull region, and if any other builder wants to buy any of that land he will have to pay Mr. Campeau's price. It is also reported that Mr. Campeau will reap a whopping \$14 million a year in rents from the federal government when the latest development complex in Hull is completed. Right now he collects about \$9 million per year in federal government rents. It sure helps to be a friend of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and his crowd.

On November 20, my colleague, the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle), gave us an insight into the background of another good friend of the Liberal party and its power brokers, the president of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. This is the man who decides housing policy for Canada, a man who has made a career of building high-priced luxury home developments. We are now led to believe that he is terribly concerned about the plight of those who can only afford relatively inexpensive housing. This man does, in fact,