

Housing

Mr. Milne: Look around and see the amount of housing that is available. Ours is such a large country that it is ironic the price of land should be such an important factor in housing costs. I am disturbed we should be building smaller and smaller houses, cutting corners wherever we can in order to accommodate the high cost of land. This is another reason why I strongly urge governments across Canada to become seriously involved in land banking as a solution for the future.

I was disturbed by the speech made by the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies).

Mr. Gillies: You did not understand it.

Mr. Milne: I understood it quite well; I could not follow the logic or, rather, it was the illogic of the speech which puzzled me. I thought it was unfair for him to take such an aggressive attitude toward the minister as though all the housing problems in Canada were his fault and all blame rested on his shoulders.

Mr. Gillies: Most of them are.

Mr. Milne: Most of the remarks the hon. member was making would have been more valid had the Mayor of Toronto and the Premier of Ontario been here representing the whole composite area. In fact we are bound to establish this type of dialogue between the three levels of government if plans in the housing field are to meet with complete success. For example, how will you resolve a problem when there is four times—

Mr. Gillies: You do not understand the issue.

Mr. Milne: I am not referring to the hon. member at the present time. As I was saying, growth in our larger cities is running at about four times the average rate as people move into the cities to take advantage of job opportunities. One finds the municipal areas trying to pursue a no-growth type of policy, with bylaws which support that approach.

What is happening is that the core areas in the large metropolitan areas are trying to enforce what amounts to a zero growth policy. This channels growth into suburban communities around the periphery of the major centres. Such areas, as I know, since I come from one, are under tremendous pressure, and the municipalities concerned face a real problem. At one time everyone thought that the more houses which were built in an area the better off residents were from the point of view of the municipal tax structure. This appears to be no longer the case. It is necessary nowadays, to make sound judgments as to the cost of this growth.

A number of hon. members have referred to the inroads upon productive agricultural land made by urban expansion. Our attitude toward this issue appears to me to be somewhat illogical. For instance, the Minister makes an announcement concerning a major housing development within the next three years, and at the same time a good deal of concern is expressed about the need to preserve good agricultural land. I think it is very unfair to propose a program under which agricultural land around metropolitan areas will be rapidly depleted while at the same time denying farmers the benefit of their annuities, or the

majority of those annuities, for the sake of the rest of society. If the authorities really value agricultural land, then the location of the services is of vital importance. If we want to continue extending services to good agricultural land it is very unfair to say that the farmers should bear the cost.

● (1640)

One of the things that really astound me, in terms of how some of the provinces are handling the situation, is the scarcity of serviced land in some of the northern towns and villages. It seems to be far more scarce than in areas surrounding our big cities. Employees who have been transferred to small towns and municipalities in northern Ontario have had to buy a very old house and remove it and build a new one just in order to get a serviced lot. This has nothing to do with the argument about preserving good agricultural land because there is none in that area. Somewhere along the line the decision must be made whether to allow development in that kind of area, and if it is, then let us get on with it.

My information is that there are probably close to 100,000 building lots across Canada which have received municipal approval but approval is being held up at the provincial level. This is why I cannot accept the argument of the hon. member for Don Valley that the problem rests entirely with the minister, because that is not the case.

I should also like strongly to support one of the points made by the minister to the effect that we must be very careful about who does the spending and who does the taxing. I thought he made that point very well. If the government were to continue, as the hon. member for Don Valley would have it, to fund the housing market across Canada and let somebody else do the spending, then I think this would be a very bad precedent. I often wonder, when I hear this sort of argument, whether we would not do better to become even more involved than we are in design, financing, and research into some of the infrastructure required, and leave the funding of the programs to the provinces which have the basic responsibility in the housing field.

Let me give an example. It is not really fair of me to comment on this situation because it is not in this jurisdiction, but let us say that in a major housing development within a very short period of time it is brought to people's attention that the municipality can no longer handle garbage removal. The whole question of disposal of waste, garbage and so on, is one to which we must address ourselves. I would not be opposed to the federal government concentrating upon this role, rather than adopt the suggestion put forward by the hon. member for Don Valley that we supply the money and have very little say in terms of how it is spent.

Some years ago it was thought that the magical answer to the housing problem would be the introduction of modular housing. The pay-off in Europe and in Great Britain has been tremendous, and a number of municipalities in the Toronto area have tried it. However, I am not aware that this is a particularly active proposition at the present time, and I wonder whether they approached it in the right way.