

Housing

meet with his colleagues and urge them to act. I was really shocked when I heard the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands say that the Prime Minister should pick a Minister of State for Urban Affairs with more influence on his colleagues. What a laugh, Madam Speaker! Since the Ministry of Urban Affairs was created, the present minister is probably one of those most aware of the social aspects I mentioned earlier. And this is true, regardless of the succeeding Liberal ministers who were Ministers of State for Urban Affairs. I do not wish to pass judgment on their administration. The factors I underlined a while ago were unknown generally at that time to both sides of the House. But now that the facts are laid down on the table, that they are being discussed, I suggest that it will take a man like the minister to assure Canadians that the social aspect of housing, the stability within the building industry, and union freedom within the building industry, are so many objectives of the government policy.

Madam Speaker, hon. members who will rise after me this afternoon will hopefully deal with these factors, and I am always at their as well as the minister's disposal to help improve these programs. Such is our function as parliamentarians. It consists really in reviewing those programs, Madam Speaker, and not only use them as smoke screens.

It is quite easy to set 265,000 housing units as a target, with the present total of 165,000, it means a total deficit of 100,000 housing units. One need not be a great economist to figure that out, Madam Speaker, as did the hon. member for Don Valley.

As for me, I am an economist, and it was not the main mathematical operation I effected to analyze the building industry. It is a complex industry, an industry that benefits or suffers from all the trends of the economy.

I am not any happier, Madam Speaker, when the policy of the government merely consists in regulating the economic machine by injecting more money into the building industry.

As I said previously, government reports have shown this to be true. The Dennis-Fisch report, Madam Speaker, clearly demonstrated that the government's objective must be 40,000 housing starts for people with low or moderate incomes. That is one of the objectives, Madam Speaker, and it cannot readily be achieved by mathematical operations.

I hope, Madam Speaker, that in the next minutes, other members will also be able to insist on such aspects and show the government where the failures really lie, where interventions are really needed, and not simply state in a general way that 100,000 more housing units are needed.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Patterson (Fraser Valley East): Madam Speaker, rising to take part in this debate today I am reminded of the numerous warnings that my leader and other members of this party have given to the government over the last two years concerning the problem that is facing Canada in the housing field. Specific warnings were given to the government to the effect that if strong actions were not taken to stimulate activity in the housing field, there would be a serious decline in housing starts and a further increase in the already skyrocketing cost of

accommodation, as well as a deepening of the crisis situation which we find ourselves involved in throughout the country today.

All of our warnings apparently were ignored, our suggestions were laughed at and shouted down, and the government continued on its way denying that any crisis existed, hiding its head in the proverbial sand with respect to the possibility of a decline in housing starts. On many occasions the minister said, "We care", and then said, "Look at what we are doing". This was characteristic of his address to the House this afternoon. He cited the various programs his department is engaged in—AHOP, RHOP and so on. But in spite of the minister's optimism and his pride in all the various programs that have been enunciated, housing starts are still declining.

I should like to refer to a news release from the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation dated April 8, 1975, which reads, in part:

Housing starts during March were at a seasonally-adjusted rate of 138,000 for all areas of Canada, according to preliminary figures. Actual starts during the month in urban areas were 6,165, a decline of 54 per cent from the 13,291 recorded for the same month a year ago. Urban starts in the first quarter of 1975 totalled 18,271, a decline of 49 per cent from the 35,826 in the first quarter of 1974.

I should like to make a few remarks about the housing situation, not from the viewpoint of the housing itself—though I realize that this is reaching a crisis point—but from the point of view of the impact that it has on the related industries in my own province of British Columbia.

● (1530)

At the outset let me say that the situation in the province is critical. Part of the reason is that British Columbia has the highest population growth in Canada. If you couple this with the drastic decline in housing starts over the last year you can see the impact this has on the residents of British Columbia. In 1974, for example, the population rose to 2.4 million people, a gain of 3.5 per cent over one year earlier. This represents more than twice the average increase for Canada as a whole. It was the highest percentage gain since 1967 and the largest absolute increase during the past decade. When we look at the situation from that point of view we can see just how seriously the economy of British Columbia and, on a wider sphere, the economy of Canada, are affected by the situation existing in the housing field today.

With the great influx of residents to British Columbia from all parts of Canada and the decline in housing starts I am sure it is evident to all what a tremendous pressure there is on the housing industry in respect of the current situation in British Columbia where we have a nil vacancy rate with an ever-increasing population demand.

As an indication of how important the forest, logging and lumber industries are to British Columbia let me put a few facts on the record. British Columbia contains less than 2 per cent of the country's forest area but, at the same, it supplies about 25 per cent of the wood cut in Canada. Forest industries accounted for approximately 20 per cent, or one-fifth of all Canadian exports in 1972. In the Canadian output in the logging sector about 47 per cent of the total production comes from British Columbia.