has indicated, that in the short space of time remaining to us before the Christmas recess the bill should be given first reading in order that it may be distributed to members for study and discussion prior to our reassembling next month.

I do like the idea the minister has put forward that, after the bill has received second reading, it should be referred to the banking and commerce committee for detailed study. It will be recalled that two years ago the banking and commerce committee made a quite extensive review of the operations of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. I feel that was a useful and constructive piece of work, and I think probably it has been the experience in that respect which has led the minister to make the suggestion he has tonight, that this bill should be referred to that committee. Personally I should like to commend the proposal the minister has made.

We are all glad indeed that the number of housing starts in 1953, so far as the figures are available, indicates that there has been a fairly substantial increase over the number of starts in 1952. The house will remember that after the year 1950 the number of housing starts in Canada dipped, beginning in the spring of 1951, and that dip continued for the space of nearly two years. Beginning in the late fall of 1952 there was some recovery and now, as we approach the end of 1953, it is evident that the number of starts in 1953 will have exceeded those of 1952 and perhaps even the best previous year, namely 1950. It may be that when the figures are complete it will appear that the number of houses completed in 1953 will compare very favourably with the number completed in any previous year.

But lest any of us become satisfied in the face of this improvement in the number of houses constructed in 1953, let us remember that the proper way to test performance in this respect is in comparison with the house-building capacity of this country. It has been estimated by those in the Canadian construction industry that the house-building capacity in Canada is 130,000 houses per annum. Mr. Mansur, president of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, has indicated that in his view a figure of 125,000 houses is within the capacity of the construction industry, although there is the problem of mortgage financing to be met. It will be remembered also that in the seven years beginning with 1946 and ending with 1952, this country did not keep pace with current housing needs, and the backlog that existed on December 31, 1945, was actually swelled by the first of January, 1953, according to the figures submitted by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, by about 17,000 housing units. We have not yet the final figures for 1953, but having regard to the rate of family formation in Canada and the extent of immigration into Canada, it is not unlikely that we will find ourselves at the end of 1953 with as large a backlog of needed houses in Canada as we had at December 31, 1945.

No hon. member of this house can be content in the face of that situation. There may be differences in estimates concerning the extent of the housing backlog in Canada at the conclusion of the war, but that figure has been estimated by authority acceptable, I am sure, to most hon. members of this house at close to 500,000 units. I hope that when the banking and commerce committee sits to consider this bill we shall have an opportunity of coming to closer grips with a calculation of the extent of the housing deficit in Canada today.

I have only this further observation to make. There will be, I may say, certain questions put to the minister following these opening statements on matters on which I trust he will be able and willing to furnish the house with information tonight, in the hope in that way to have a more informed discussion on second reading of the bill. It is hoped also that time may be saved in that way.

Whatever may be the outcome of the proposals for revamping Canada's housing legislation, its administration will still remain a matter of cardinal importance in the approach of the government and parliament to our national housing problem. We can have the best legislation in the world, but we will still have to have drive, vigour and vision behind the administration of the housing legislation. There must, moreover, be even-handed justice in the way in which the housing legislation is administered by the government and its agent, Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. There must be fair play for all parts of Canada.

There has been a feeling that, through no particular fault of the government or the corporation, the larger centres have received better treatment under the provisions of part I of the housing act than smaller communities. There were reasons for that. But we hope, Mr. Chairman, that plans will become possible under the new legislation to carry the benefits of the new legislation to all parts of Canada where a housing need exists.

In the administration of that legislation, let us see to it that there are no favourites played. On November 18 in this house I drew attention to what appeared then and still appears to be a case of bold discrimination in favour of one part of Canada, simply