

Housing Prices

These are some of the ills and some of the solutions I would suggest. Above all, I suggest there is a need for greater action by the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Basford). As I have said, he needs greater powers, and this has been argued by others including my leader. That gives me hope the day will come when we will have a federal department that will not only pay lip service to the idea that Canada is rapidly becoming urbanized, that the rural pleasantries of the Canada of Sir John A. Macdonald is giving way to the vast conglomeration in our cities, but will introduce policies that will be wise and sensible enough to provide a more stable and more meaningful way of life for the people living in the cities. I have presented some of my suggestions. My colleagues will follow with others. The matter is really too important to be simply a matter of presenting ideas over and over again in Parliament. This is a time for action. It is a time for action now.

• (1250)

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, the members of the New Democratic Party agree with the substance of the motion brought forward by the Progressive Conservative party. We say the government has failed to take measures which would provide all citizens with decent housing at reasonable prices. If a vote were to be taken on the motion we would add two amendments. The first amendment would be to the effect that the government has failed to provide decent housing at reasonable cost and also at reasonable interest rates. The second amendment would be to the effect that the government has failed to give any protection to purchasers of new homes against home builders who perform shoddy and defective workmanship and supply inferior materials in the construction of new homes. Those are the two amendments we would move.

I am sure most Canadians agree with the principle set forth in the task force report on housing back in 1969 when it declared that all Canadians should be entitled to clean, warm shelter as a matter of a basic human right. We in the New Democratic Party, and many others, would adopt the stronger and more forceful approach that was set forth by the Canadian Social Development Council when it said that all Canadians should be guaranteed the right to decent housing, whether or not they can afford it. The government has failed to implement either of these two principles. I agonize when I recall the performance of the ministers since I came into the House of Commons in 1965.

First, we have had five ministers in eight years. I am sure the officials of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation cannot sing the familiar song "I am getting to know you" because having five ministers in eight years does not give leadership for the development of firm policies under the National Housing Act we have today. I recall, first of all, when John Nicholson and the present Minister of National Defence (Mr. Benson) took the approach of acting as friendly bankers and just supplying the money without giving leadership. In the period 1965-68, we had a tremendous shortfall in housing construction units across the country.

Then we had the present member for Trinity (Mr. Hellyer) who set up a task force to study the problems of

Housing. That task force reached certain conclusions. First of all, it said that the private sector could take care of the housing needs. It is obvious that the private sector has failed to achieve this objective. Second, the then minister said we should take the ceiling off interest rates and then the interest rates in all probability would drop. The government failed to adopt that approach. The minister at that time then suggested that a damper be placed on public housing. The result was that public housing was set back and the need for public housing across the country has intensified. Finally, he said we should deal directly with the municipalities in respect of purchasing land. He presented this proposal to the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) who rejected it. The result was that the present member for Trinity resigned as minister.

Then we had the present Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andras), who brought to the housing portfolio the compassion and sincerity he acquired when dealing with the Indians. He became overwhelmed with the problem of housing and said that we must take the research approach. He hired Harvey Lithwick who brought forth a report. No action was taken on the report and Mr. Lithwick had to resign. He said the whole department is just an empire-building bureaucracy. Then, we had Michael Dennis, because the minister said we should have a report on research and planning in respect of housing. This report has been concealed. We have a concealment of reports by the present minister, especially those which would be embarrassing to the government. The minister refuses to table them and make them public. He keeps us all in the dark in respect of their comments and recommendations.

Then, the present Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs said we must have innovative housing and undertake a new approach. The government set aside \$200 million to take care of that. The housing committee of the Canadian Social Development Council put the situation quite well when, in its report, it said that there was nothing innovative with regard to the houses built and that in fact if there was any result it was smaller homes on smaller lots. The present Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs then decided that a new department should be set up and that he should be made the Minister of Urban Affairs. This was what he did. Perhaps he was embarrassed in respect of his other position as Minister without Portfolio in charge of housing. He was probably charged with being the minister without housing in charge of portfolios. As a result, we have the present minister who this morning said we would have progressive and forward-looking proposals from this government.

I have seen nothing new, nothing bold, nothing courageous and nothing aggressive undertaken by the present minister. In fact, he has presented one bill, Bill C-209, which really constitutes a financial rip-off with regard to the financial institutions which have persuaded him to give them certain tax concessions provided they place their money in mortgages. When that bill comes forward I shall deal with it in more detail. All the minister has done has been to present four proposals to the provinces in respect of public housing. For the low income people, he introduced mortgages over a 40-year period and introduced certain amendments in respect of home improve-