

*Request for Housing Statement*

known as the Battery, which has been a political football for years, bounced back and forth between provincial, municipal and federal governments with nobody wanting to claim the responsibility for it. The poor who are forced to live in this area continue to suffer the consequences and the inconveniences. Another such area is Munday Pond, which will be referred to by my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Carter), and which is now the subject of further urban renewal. But I ask the minister, why did he not announce today a real list of priorities covering specific problems in the various specific areas of the country?

These problems exist all across Canada, perhaps more glaringly in the major cities, but they exist in the rural areas as well. Notwithstanding what the minister said, or any of the pious hopes he enunciated, the fact remains that housing today is failing to keep pace with the demands of a just society, and has failed to keep pace with the demands of our growing urban environment. As compared with May last year, it is an undeniable fact that housing starts in May this year were down 50 per cent. Accompanying this decline is a related growth in unemployment. The two usually go hand in hand. In my own province, unemployment figures have reached the astonishing level of 15 per cent. Indeed, it has been suggested the actual unemployment figure is in excess of 20 per cent. I understand that the figure for the Atlantic provinces as a whole is in excess of 10 per cent. The unemployment figure for the province of Quebec is approaching or is in excess of 9 per cent.

These are areas in which housing starts have been declining. But the largest decline in housing starts has been in the urban areas, with Windsor, Ontario, down 80 per cent; Halifax, Nova Scotia, down 69 per cent; Calgary down 57 per cent; Toronto down 53 per cent; Edmonton down 45 per cent, and Montreal down 40 per cent. That is the kind of fact we should contend with, not the pious plans of the government or of the minister to deal with the problem over a long-term period. The problem is so acute that it needs immediate attention here and now.

• (4:10 p.m.)

In the first quarter of 1970 housing starts were down in all provinces of Canada. The decline in housing starts right across the country ranged from the amazing figure of 90.4 per cent in Saskatchewan to 61.5 per cent in my province, Newfoundland. In Ontario, the decline was 48 per cent, with British

[Mr. McGrath.]

Columbia experiencing the smallest decline. This shows how serious is this problem, Mr. Speaker. It is the most serious problem facing the country. Yes, we are concerned, because the government has failed to come to grips with it. I believe it is fair to say that the hon. member for Trinity resigned from the cabinet because of the failure of the government to realize the urgency of the housing crisis and the urban problem in Canada today. By accepting the minister's resignation, the government automatically placed this problem well down on its list of priorities. I do not think the present minister can deny that.

I sympathize with the minister. He faces problems in the cabinet; he knows that his predecessor was forced to resign because the government failed to deal with the housing problem. The minister is concerned because he has seen many areas of Canada in which the housing problem is really acute. I suggest that unless he can obtain action soon by his cabinet colleagues, he will have no alternative except to follow the course of his predecessor in office and resign. That will be the only honourable course for him to take.

A few days ago in my home town, St. John's, I received a call from a constituent who was on the verge of being placed on the street, and I did something I rarely do. I called the housing authority and said, "I am not trying to interfere politically or influence your decision in any way, but I happen to know the circumstances of this particular case. This man, his wife and children are on the verge of being put out on the street. Can you do something for them?" I described the circumstances and gave them the man's name. The official pulled out the file and said, "He is so far down the list that I doubt whether it will be possible to do anything for him within the next year." That man was far down the list; 900 families ahead of him, were waiting, to be allocated a public housing unit, each one of them hoping to get out of inadequate slum housing they were forced to live in, often as a result of circumstances over which they had little or no control.

I hope that the minister will bring some specific solution to these specific problems in my city. I hope, for example, that he will announce a gigantic public housing scheme which will be wholly financed by the federal government, because this is a special case. He knows full well this is a special case and the reason for it. It is because the government of Newfoundland is strapped financially, to the point where it is unable to undertake any