

# *A program for the people*



By **ROBERT M. STRACHAN**  
NDP Provincial Leader

There is a growing feeling of fear, apprehension and anger throughout British Columbia. This feeling is engendered partly because of happenings on the federal field and partly on the provincial field.

Nationally we have had a Conference of the Confederation of Tomorrow attended by all the Premiers of Canada except Premier Bennett. We have also been witness to Mr. Sharp's budget of last June. This was followed by numerous statements in recent weeks threatening dire things for the economy. On November 30 came the mini-budget with increased taxes followed a week later by an announcement of a considerable cut-back in federal spending. We have also had a federal-provincial meeting on medicare which indicated that we will have no national medicare scheme. Finally we have had a federal-provincial meeting on housing (again attended by all the Premiers but our own), which produced what has all the earmarks of being another scheme for providing housing for

our lower income groups that will only end in continual buck-passing.

Provincially we have had our Premier announce with a grand flourish that from now on he wants to be addressed as Mr. Prime Minister. (Anyone worthy of being addressed as Prime Minister wouldn't worry about what his title was). Then we had a threat of wage and price controls; followed in rapid order by the news that the Queen of Prince Rupert would not be put back in operation until next spring. Then there was another freeze on school construction. We have also been informed by a Victoria doctor, that patients are dying because of the long waiting list for hospitals and finally our three public universities have announced that they will be turning students away next year unless there are drastic changes in present plans.

No wonder there is a rising surge of anger and disenchantment throughout the province. The honeymoon is over. It must now be obvious that flying the economy by the seat of the pants with political expediency and private privilege as

guideposts, can only lead to crashing chaos and many unfilled needs throughout the province.

For many years Mr. Bennett and his government have been riding high on the crest of booming times but now that there are economic problems it is obvious that his policies are no different to those of the Liberals and Conservatives.

During these years we in the New Democratic Party have been advocating the policies that would have provided the economic growth without run away inflation. We also advocated the policies that would have provided the schools, hospitals and other public works so badly needed. These policies would have involved the government to a greater degree and much more directly in the economic development of the province.

The New Democratic Party is growing in strength and support. We expect to keep on growing as more and more people look for the answers to the many problems that are now showering around the heads of the people of British Columbia and Canada.

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# *There is a solution*

By **BOB WILLIAMS, MLA**

Canadians have tended to think that man's search for shelter is mainly a problem in other countries, yet it is one of the great problems of our own country. Hundreds of thousands of Canadian families live in over-crowded housing, many live in substandard housing. And we all live in housing that should be costing us less.

The past year in British Columbia has shown a housing need greater than any time since the second world war. At that time, after 1945, because of the great need and public protest, government intervened and built housing in countless cities across the country. It was then that the National Housing Act was passed. But today the National Housing Act is not enough. Today the N.H.A. housing, which is a product of that Act, is not meeting the needs of people. The Act has mainly produced housing for the middle and upper middle income groups in the country — and then mainly on a basis satisfactory to the private mortgage companies.

The search for shelter is most difficult for those in the lower income groups, those on fixed incomes and those with families. And while the needs of these groups are not being met at all, the needs of the middle income groups are only being met at excessive cost. Housing simply costs too much today.

Too often our governments have regarded housing simply as an economic "pump primer." When the economy slows down we build housing or provide money for housing through the federal Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Government has not regarded housing as a social need, but rather

as a stimulus to the economy when things are slack.

But this is where government has gone wrong because the needs of people are not directly related to the business cycle, people need adequate housing regardless of the business cycle.

We in the New Democratic Party believe that a new approach must be taken, a new approach based on human values. Housing must be seen as one of *the* basic needs in a modern society.

The National Housing Act has mainly been geared to guaranteeing the loans of mortgage companies in the housing field; that is guaranteeing that mortgage companies will not lose the money they invest in housing, (thus eliminating any risk factors for those who least need the help of government).

What should be guaranteed is shelter for our citizens, not risk free investments for major lending institutions.

The most important and often most ignored aspect of housing is the price of land in our cities.

The great increase in costs in the housing field cannot be attributed to labor and materials. The great cost increase for housing in Canada, and in British Columbia, has been in the price of urban land.

Countless people can remember when residential lots in Vancouver and Burnaby, in the later 1940's, were selling for as low as \$200 or \$300 a lot. The land market however has become a semi-monopoly market. This has meant that 20 years later lots in the same districts cost \$7,000 or \$8,000. A cost that puts housing out of reach of almost everybody.

Land prices have increased from 20-30 times in the last twenty years, while wages have increased

only a fraction of that amount. What this means is that a relatively few property owners are profiting from this situation.

Right now, housing demand greatly exceeds supply and as long as we face this situation house prices will continue to rise and home ownership will become impossible for most families.

If government was truly concerned about the housing problem then it would tackle the cost question so that more people could afford their own homes.

Modest attempts have recently been made in British Columbia through the Home Owner Acquisition Grant of \$500.00, but the grant does not come near to tackling the larger problems related to houses and cities. The grant is an attempt to subsidize home ownership but the long term result will probably be to encourage higher land costs.

If the basic land cost problem is not tackled and resolved, then land prices will continue to rise, forcing more people to do without the kind of housing they need.

The high land costs mean that the saving of individuals will be diverted from home building to the buying of the lot. Your savings will be dissipated by land inflation rather than going into the productive enterprise of home building.

The NDP believes that providing housing — good housing — for our citizens should be one of the main concerns of Government. That is not to say that government should build the housing or all of the housing, but rather that government should make sure that conditions exist where all people can be assured of adequate shelter.

## **What We Will Do:**

1. *The NDP would tackle the problem of land speculation. Speculation and land inflation have in-*

# to the housing crisis!

creased housing costs to a prohibitive level. Between 1950 and 1960 the price of building materials rose by 24 per cent, wages in the building trades rose by 60 per cent but land prices leaped by anything from 100 per cent to 3,760 per cent depending on the city. The consequences of land speculation are disastrous for everybody but the speculator.

We believe that an increased tax on the value of unimproved land would be a powerful incentive to land owners to develop or get off. This kind of tax would also lighten the tax burden on homeowners that pay increased taxes when they improve their own property.

2. *The NDP would establish "Land Banks."* The best way to beat speculation beyond the tax proposals covered above is for the public to become land owners through local government. We believe that cities should buy development land, particularly on the edge of the city, so that it can be planned and serviced before home construction begins. It would also mean that land could be sold at cost so that exorbitant profits would be removed.

3. *The NDP would work for low interest housing loans.* The NDP does not believe that interest rates for housing should be tied to the cycle of the private money market. The NDP would work toward changes in the National Legislation in order to assure low interest loans for individual home buyers.

4. *The NDP would enact a Tenants Bill of Rights.* Such a bill of rights would require landlords to give notice of rental increases three months in advance. It would require landlords to lease at a fixed rate for a period of not less than a year upon the request of the tenant that has shown reasonable performance.

5. *The NDP would embark on an increased program of public housing.* In British Columbia, only one city, Vancouver, has a public housing program. The National Housing Act provides that Ottawa will pay 75 per cent of the cost and the Province pay the remaining 25 per cent of the cost of public housing. This is housing that has a rental subsidy and rents are based on ability to pay.



Having public housing confined to separate large enclaves such as Skeena and Raymur in Vancouver creates socially segregated parts of the city that should not be repeated for they do not meet our standards of social justice.

In the present emergency however public housing has a vital role and must be expanded and it must be dispersed.

The NDP would also work to encourage the growth of co-operative housing in order to help low income families share in the ownership of their new homes.

6. *The NDP would establish*

*occupancy standards.* The NDP would enact legislation which would make it possible for tenants to see that premises are repaired and maintained at reasonable occupancy standards. While we realize only a minority of landlords fail to maintain their premises we believe that in those instances where buildings are in very poor repair it should be possible to advise the City and if necessary the city execute the repairs and add the cost to the tax bill.

7. *The NDP would take a new approach to urban renewal.* Urban renewal has only begun to get under way in British Columbia. It is financed 50 per cent - 25 per cent by the Federal and Provincial Governments. In Vancouver the funds have been used mainly for clearance in the older parts of the city. Unfortunately the approach has been to neglect the human factors. The people who are displaced are rarely consulted. Those living in the poorest housing in the city are usually the aged, the unemployed or deserted mothers with large families. Poor housing is generally all that is available for these people. When that housing is destroyed, these people have no easy alternatives.

The direction that might be taken should be more in the area of rehabilitation of older buildings where, if at all feasible, funds should be supplied for the repair, renovation and alteration of these dwellings.

8. *Emergency shelter.* The NDP would establish a fund for communities that wish to provide a stock of emergency housing for families left without shelter by disaster or economic circumstances. The emergency housing stock could become as natural a municipal function as the fire and police departments.

# Education for opportunity

By EILEEN DAILLY, MLA

Today the undereducated are the unemployed and the unemployed are the poor. The children of the poor are the school dropouts and the school dropouts are the unemployed.

The New Democratic Party believes that it is the responsibility of government to provide an educational system in our province which will give all our citizens the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

The New Democratic Party contends that in our province today there are barriers to full educational growth. *What are these barriers and what policies of the New Democratic Party will eradicate them?*

## Day Care Centers

The working mother is here to stay. Thousands of children in BC do not have proper supervised day care facilities to attend while their mothers are working.

The New Democratic Party would step-up the involvement of the government in the establishment of these needed centers and also increase government subsidies to these centers.

## Kindergartens

Kindergartens have been accepted as an integral part of many school systems in Canada and other parts of the world for years.

In the province of British Columbia only about one-third of our students have the opportunity to attend a public school kindergarten. The New Democratic Party believes that kindergartens should be part of our basic school program and that they should be financed on

the same grant basis as the other grades in our public school system.

The importance of a proper pre-school environment can never be underestimated in relation to a child's future development.

## Public School System

Of course our modern schools are a great improvement on the "little red schoolhouse" of the past. But the New Democratic Party believes that the whole philosophy of education, especially primary, elementary and secondary schools must be changed to adequately meet the needs of the new technological society in which our children will live.

To do this, our provincial department of education must give strong, vigorous leadership to school districts, encourage experimental programs through the provision of government funds for educational research and providing increased funds to school districts for the new tools of learning which the new age demands.

The New Democratic Party is aware of the importance of providing a curriculum for our senior students which will not create a barrier as a result of either too much or too early specialization. The time is past when we can reasonably expect to hold the same job throughout our working life. Increasingly, the premium will be on the kind of education which can be applied to a variety of occupations. An education which teaches our young people to think for themselves and adapt to different situations and kinds of work is essential.

## Higher Education

Today, because of the great ex-

pense of attending institutions of higher learning and an actual lack of classroom space, many deserving students are denied access to such institutions.

The New Democratic Party believes that just as public school education has been accepted as a right for all children, so too must we accept the fact that higher education, through universities, community colleges, technological institutes and vocational schools, must be made available for all deserving students.

The New Democratic Party is working toward the increase of both provincial and federal grants to provide the capital and operating funds necessary to build and maintain facilities of higher learning in this province. An over-all policy must also be adopted so that no deserving student is deprived the opportunity to attend such institutions because of lack of financial means.

To break down the barriers which exist today in education means that education must become one of the biggest activities in our society. It must involve more people, more public expenditure, more organization and more daily preoccupation.

It is no longer possible to build success simply on human physical energy and on raw resources. Attainment of our ambitious social and economic goals will depend on how well prepared our citizens are both emotionally and intellectually. For this we need, above all, a highly educated and informed population.

The New Democratic Party believes it is the duty of government to see that our educational system in British Columbia will produce such a population.