

The man in Housing's hot seat

In a one-and-a-half hour interview at his Hagley Park office recently, Minister Golding outlined some of the plans he has for helping Jamaicans to own their own homes. The first part of the interview appeared in the Sunday Sun, October 8.

When can we expect the National Housing Policy?

"We are working on it. As a matter of fact we appointed a National Housing Advisory Committee in April and they completed the preliminary outline in terms of a policy for proper housing. They cleared this with me some three months ago and the document went back to them to expand and elaborate in particular areas we had identified. Since that time the matter has progressed further because we had asked the USAID for assistance in putting together the programme. A team of four arrived in the island three weeks ago and they will be working with us until December.

"But I am hoping that the National Housing Policy in terms of a finished position and document will be available early in the year. It has to go through a process of examination at Cabinet level and that may take some time. We will also need the input of the Parliamentary elected team because housing is intimate to people generally and particularly to MP's who have to face the problem. I would like to get their reaction on how it fits in with their constituency programme.

"We are also looking at the area of reduced cost. We are looking at the type of materials we are using to see if we can achieve the same type of housing without having to spend the same kind of money. For that reason we are looking at substitution of various indigenous material, such as clay, brick, tile, roofing material, gypsum, chipboard and cement particle board.

"I am not saying we should start building paper houses but we have a Building Code which says every 16 inches you must have a steel bar and steel is expensive. Steel has gone up in the last 10 years from \$200 a ton to \$1,600 a ton. It is a very complicated document. We have a team reviewing it and that team is working out of the Ministry of Finance, which strangely enough is the Ministry responsible for the Building Code."

Are there any plans to rearrange that?

"Well, perhaps in time. I don't have a difficulty now because this Minister and

the current Minister of Finance work pretty closely together. It is being done in close consultation with us and we have representatives on the Committee."

Do you have a deadline?

"No, we don't have a deadline as such. We now have a new draft and we are trying to get the response from the engineering and architectural fraternities on it. We are trying to get the response of these associations on whether they think there are aspects of it which may be encroaching on the requirements.

Related to the whole question of cost reduction is the need for a Building Research Institute. There is no facility at the moment. There was a little unit at the Scientific Research Council but it was very limited and amateurish, nothing on a major scale. It seems that any effort to reduce construction costs is going to suffer unless it is done in conjunction with a scientific approach to new building materials and techniques, and that is something which can't be done on a construction site, it will have to be done in a lab.

"We are getting a tremendous amount of assistance from HABITAT and when I was in the Philippines in April I had discussions with their executive director who has offered technical assistance in setting it up. It is likely to cost about \$2 million to set up this unit and we are to get some financing from the Venezuelan Government through the Venezuelan Investment Fund. We hope to be able to get that set up in 1982.

"Still on the question of reduction of cost. Jamaicans are going to have to make up their minds to trim normally required standards. We have grown accustomed to certain finishes in the houses and they make the difference between owning a house and not being able to own one. The sort of things I am talking about for example is the quarter-inch of finely mixed concrete that sits on your wall which costs expensive labour to apply. We have a team which is actually working out how much it costs to render these walls.

"Jamaicans are going to have to be prepared to accept responsibility for a greater share of the construction of their houses. For that reason we are going to be embarking on two kinds of projects. One is the Shell Unit and the UDC has done an experimental project on that. A Shell Unit is basically four walls and a roof which is allocated in that state and the persons will have to finish it up on their own. The other one we plan to embark on is the Starter Home.

Is this a takeoff from Sites and Services?

"I suppose that is one way of putting it. But what you are providing is the initial

basic core of the house. The basic problem was that people did not have any land, could not go through the hassle of getting a plan and couldn't find the money to start anything. We are providing the basic core that a family can move in and then add to it.

"It differs from the Sites and Services as under that programme they were provided with a wall and then had to get into construction before it could be inhabited. What we are doing is providing something they can inhabit right now.

"The Squatter Upgrading programme as it is now seeks to deal with people after they have demonstrated their own initiatives and I want to develop a programme that can harness that drive.

Is there any particular dream you have, any stamp you want to leave on the Ministry so people can point to this as an accomplishment during your tenure?

"It is a mixture of two things. I have launched a massive crusade within the Ministry against corruption. I have almost made it a ritual and I am prepared to make public examples. I find that the Service is very unresponsive. We caught someone who was clearly guilty of serious corruption and up to now he can't be fired, the most is that he goes on sick leave. He was to have reported back for work on Monday but I made it clear that if he came back I would resign. This is a case where somebody has been found guilty of authorising purchases since January of about \$¼ million at prices 50-70 per cent above the prices for which these goods are normally available, and that person can't be fired because the service is so protective of him.

"Secondly we have set up a Community Development Division and this reflects a particular thinking I have. We have been setting up structures but we have not been building to fit the people, and we have done nothing to teach the people how to live in their new environment. This division is the first one that goes into the area before any contractor or engineer. They find out the socio-economic situation, family, religion and on the basis of this information we design a scheme. They then work alongside the contractors."

At 33 years old Minister Golding is one of the youngest Cabinet members. He has a degree in Business from UWI.

According to him his work day begins at 2 or 3 a.m. because "that's when I am most alert and I am not disturbed. Nobody calls you at three in the morning and the kids are asleep. I normally work until 6 and if I feel tired I may go back to sleep for another hour. I get into the office by 9 or 9:30 and I leave at 7 most evenings. Sometimes they send me home by 5 p.m."

His hobbies are bird shooting, swimming and motoring and he wryly observed that "My hobbies are not things that can be pursued as a matter of routine."

And despite his heavy schedule of running what is in fact two ministries, Housing and Works, he still finds time for wife Lorna, and their two children.