

Housing

staff to provincial native organizations where their skills may be required.

As I have already indicated to the House, Mr. Speaker, assistance in training and development, like all other aspects of the policy, is equally available to all rural people.

Hon. members will recognize that the rural and native people's housing policy, in several of its aspects, provides an opportunity for provincial government participation. I had already, before Christmas, consulted with my provincial counterparts and formally advised the provincial ministers yesterday of this fact, and I will be arranging to meet with them in the next few weeks to enlist their formal co-operation. Following these consultations, I will be meeting again with the native people's organizations and I am confident that, for the 1974 construction season, we will be well launched on an aggressive campaign of native and rural housing programs.

I am happy to report these details to the House. By any standard, Mr. Speaker, we are one of the best housed peoples in the world. We are also a rich, successful society. But in that society, in the rural and isolated areas, we have some of the worst housing of any people in the world, much of it inhabited by people of native origin. These proposals which the government has made to the native organizations will, in my view, promote a major replacing of that housing. It will require an immense amount of work by those of us in the federal and provincial governments and in the native organizations themselves, but I hope all three groups are ready to begin to implement these proposals immediately.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, my first words, of course, will be to congratulate the minister and hope that the program will be as successful as he suggested it will be. I did not really expect him to make this statement today. I read about the program in the newspaper last evening but received a copy of the statement just now. That may have been due to accident or some other reason.

Without having read the statement, I think I can comment because I know something about the native people of Canada, those who live on reservations and those who do not. I noticed one omission in the statement. Nothing was said about the native peoples living in the two northern territories of Canada.

In the statement the minister dealt at some length with federal and provincial arrangements for co-operation in housing. When we deal with housing for the native peoples of Canada who live either on reserves or off, we must consider the conditions under which they live. Anyone who has visited native people living on reservations will be aware of these conditions. I have personal knowledge of the conditions under which they live in western Canada because I had the honour for a number of years to represent the people of the former constituency of Bow River prior to redistribution.

In that constituency are two reservations, the Blackfoot Reservation and the Morley Reservation. I also know something about the people in the area where the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) lives, having practised law there for some time. I am

[Mr. Basford.]

aware of the conditions under which native people live in northern Saskatchewan. I say, and I think all hon. members will agree with me, that the conditions under which native people have been forced to live, either by the Indian Act or by governments in the past, stand as a monument to our inhumanity, of our inhuman attitude toward these people.

On many occasions we have read in the newspapers about the poor housing to which these people have been subjected over the years. They are forced to burn energy other than natural gas or oil. Many times there have been fires and families have been destroyed along with their houses. These people have been forced to live under such conditions for a number of years. Therefore I wish the minister success in this program.

The minister talked about 50,000 houses. If there could be a crash program and these 50,000 houses could be built immediately, it would certainly relieve much of the present suffering and inhumanity.

I hope the minister will also take a hard look at another fact that is all too often forgotten. Schools and hospitals have been closed on reservations and the children are forced to go to school elsewhere. These people should be able to enjoy a high standard of hospitalization within their own region.

It was my fortune this morning to meet with a group of native people in connection with their oil rights on certain Indian reservations, particularly with regard to the surtax being creamed off in the sale of Canadian crude petroleum. These people were promised certain things by their treaties. They should be entitled to share in that tax so that their living standards can be upgraded not only with regard to housing but other basic needs such as food for their families. One need only visit those families and see the manner in which they live to realize they are badly in need of assistance.

I again wish the minister every success in this program. I hope it is a crash program and that it will get off the ground and not just be a matter of words.

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, the other day I read in the newspaper that Mr. Lawrence Gladu had been appointed to the Native Housing Committee of Central Housing and Mortgage Corporation by Mr. Teron. I am pleased to see that some attempt is finally being made to involve native people formally in the activities of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Mr. Gladu, along with others, will be a great asset with regard to native housing needs.

The statement made by the minister today is long overdue. It would have had much more impact three, four or five years ago. It would have been much more valuable at that time. Nevertheless, it is welcome. I am sure the native people will feel that some recognition is finally being given to the deplorable conditions under which they have had to live for many years.

When the forces of society can be organized and developed and the wealth of society used to assist those who are disadvantaged, it is a credit to the political system of this nation and, indeed, to society itself. There should not be any question about our endorsement of that philosophy.