

Urgency of Housing Debate

about the shortage of low rental housing for people of average income. This is where the prime responsibility of the government lies, but requests for such housing must originate from civic and provincial authorities.

Mr. Mac T. McCutcheon (Lambton-Kent): Far be it from me to attempt to give advice pertaining to the rules of this house. However, it is my understanding that the matter to be decided now is the necessity or urgency of debate at the present time. Is there or is there not a matter of urgency in and for the national interest relating to housing? In order to decide on the urgency of the debate I suggest a valued judgment must take place regarding how accurate and reliable are the reports of the economic council. If we assume that the advice of the economic council should be heeded—I for one believe that it should—then we need not only refer to the last and most recent report but we must refer to the previous reports made by this body a year ago. At that time a warning was issued to the government of an impending catastrophe in the housing situation. I submit that having largely ignored these warnings for well over a year the government has allowed a crisis of major importance to develop.

● (3:30 p.m.)

In view of the unpardonable delay, I suggest that there is now urgency of debate in regard to this matter of extreme national concern.

Hon. A. J. MacEachen (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, normally at this stage of this kind of debate comments are expected to be restricted to the procedural point whether there is urgency of debate and whether the normal business of the house ought to be set aside so as to permit the house to deal with a matter that is not listed on the order paper for consideration by the house.

The discussion so far, Mr. Speaker, has, of course, been completely out of order—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. MacEachen: —because it has been directed entirely to the substance of the matter, namely, the housing situation in Canada.

I do not intend to go into the substance as fully as have hon. gentlemen opposite, but I should like to put on the record the fact that

the government of Canada regards this matter as one of great importance and of great seriousness.

The government of Canada has taken action in the current year to add substantially to the development of a housing program in Canada. The Minister of Labour, who is responsible for housing, is unavoidably absent from the house today on public business, but in the past he has put on the record the facts with respect to the housing situation in Canada.

There will be opportunities very shortly to deal with this matter in an orderly way at a time when the minister is in the house.

Mr. Churchill: He should be here today.

Mr. MacEachen: There is on the order paper, Mr. Speaker, yet to be dealt with the estimates of the Department of Labour. These can be called at an appropriate time. We have the adjourned budget debate, with an amendment, and also a subamendment. One aspect of the subamendment opens up very clearly the field of housing. This must be dealt with by the house, and it will be at an early date. There are three supply motions to be considered by the house. Anyone of those can be chosen as an opportunity to deal with housing. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the situation has not changed in a way that would require the house to deal with this question today. I suggest that normal opportunities for debate will be available very shortly that will give members of the house an opportunity to deal with this very serious and important matter.

We have listed for consideration today other matters of public business, and these matters of public business are important. At a very early date, through one of the opportunities I have mentioned it will be possible for members of the house to express their concern about this important matter. The Minister of Labour will then be able to set on the record the facts with respect to housing and to outline the policy of the government.

If the motion for adjournment were accepted today, Mr. Speaker, it would be quite futile because the spokesman for the government who is normally present to deal with these matters would not be present.

Mr. Nielsen: Is he the only spokesman for the government?

Mr. Pearson: Same old gang.