

Suggested Lack of Urban Policy

co-ordination in this field. I have said on a number of occasions in the past that we require a national and, as the hon. member for Selkirk stated, rational urban policy in this country, rather than a federal one. I am convinced that national policy will emerge only as a joint project of the three levels of government and numerous other interested and affected groups in our society.

This government believes that a federal perspective and position is necessary to the successful conduct of intergovernmental discussion and negotiation regarding urban affairs. We certainly are addressing ourselves to that very important matter. As I suggested earlier, our studies have proceeded to an advanced stage. The position of the federal government is under intense and active discussion and deliberation amongst my colleagues. In that sense the debate today is premature.

I want to be brief this evening. I wish to comment on some of the remarks that have been made regarding housing. In the Throne speech last fall this government made a commitment of one million new home starts in the five-year period 1970-74. We stated there would be special emphasis given to the provision of homes for people on low incomes. A Standing Committee studies estimates on housing and urban matters. Incidentally, if it was the wish of the committee it could hear representations by citizens and groups. Although it does not have the name "urban affairs", it could be quite useful for that purpose. There is nothing in the rules of this House that would prevent this.

I indicated to the Standing Committee the other evening that the present rate of housing starts augmented by a recent contact with the lending institutions indicated that we are heading for 180,000 to 185,000 units. I would like to see a great many more than that. To the best of my ability and the ability of the government, we are addressing ourselves to the commitment to provide low-income housing to a greater degree than ever before.

Last year, under section 35 of the public housing an low income program and under section 16, commonly known as limited dividend, non-profit, etc., we made loan commitments for 27,500 units. This year under those two programs we will make loan commitments on at least 35,000 units. This combination in 1969 and 1970 adds up to approximately 62,000 units. In the previous history of the National Housing Act, some 20 years, there had been 82,000 units under those two

programs. This totalled a 75 per cent commitment performance in two years compared with the previous 20-plus years.

Mr. McGrath: May I ask a question? I am very interested in this point because I come from an area where there is a long waiting list for subsidized housing. Why cannot the government supply enough units to equal the demand for subsidized housing units across the country?

• (9:40 p.m.)

Mr. Andras: Nothing would delight me more, but the simple answer, as the hon. member knows, is that to do so would probably mean that all the financial resources of the government would have to be directed to that one measure alone. I regret we cannot solve all the housing problems of this country, particularly in the low-income sector, in one year.

Reference has been made in the debate to another figure, 250,000 new homes a year. I should like to see this figure realized, too. We could even justify, I suppose, a target of 300,000 homes a year; the more houses we build in the next ten years, the sooner we shall have the perfect answer to housing needs. I had the advantage last month of visiting a number of western European countries. I was in Finland, a great country with a great people; I was in Sweden and Austria, Italy and England. I talked with housing authorities and urban planning experts in each of those countries. Sweden, it seemed to me, had some very interesting approaches to its urban problems. On the basis of 180,000 to 185,000 starts, Sweden is the only western nation which has done better than we have in starts per thousand of the population or in starts per thousand population increase.

In Britain, under a Labour government, the objective is something like 550,000 starts, as it has been over the past several years. But the best they have done is 400,000 units. In the United States they have an objective of 2,600,000 housing starts a year. This year they will accomplish 1,400,000. So when we loosely bandy about figures of this kind, we must deal both with those whose achievement is desirable, as an approach to perfection, and with those which are in line with our financial capacity bearing in mind all the other objectives which the government is attempting to realize. So it is all the more important to address ourselves to the question of the correct distribution of the housing units which are being built.