

*National Housing Act*

• (1650)

I am particularly concerned with some of the programs designed for people of moderate means, and programs geared to people with no income of their own, people who are living on social assistance, old age pensioners and the physically handicapped. If it is ever our intention to find a solution to Canada's social crisis and to the problem of our poor, we must first of all find ways by which those people can provide for themselves a proper and comfortable home environment. So, I look to the minister of housing and urban affairs to take the first step. I make him responsible, in the first instance, for finding a solution to this problem which is crippling our nation—a situation where more than one-third of our people are living in huts or shacks, or at least in substandard conditions. Almost all of their other problems would solve themselves once a family who has lived on social assistance for two or three generations experiences the pleasure and satisfaction that comes with modern living. This is particularly true of the problems faced by children and young people who are being moved to a new environment.

Again I wish to say that the minister has in some areas taken this first step, but because of a breakdown in communications the services provided by his department do not find implementation. Now, why would that be, Mr. Speaker? At first glance it would seem that Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the National Housing Act are just other government services wherein all ink is used to print red tape and the bureaucrats' first concern is self-perpetuation. However, this is only partly true in the department of housing and urban affairs. This department has actually gone a long way to decentralize its services by making sure that its regional offices are made available to serve the need. It is, however, not enough just to maintain regional offices, because if we examine the work these offices are doing, we find that almost all effort is directed toward accommodating the construction industry, not people who are in need of housing.

I wonder whether or not as a result of this the cost of the average home has gone up by 100 per cent in the last 10 years. Price is usually the last thing the contractor discusses with his client. The builder makes all the financial arrangements with the corporation and charges whatever the traffic will bear, and as a result the corporation serves the demand of the greedy instead of the needy.

My solution to this problem is that the corporation must first of all find ways to convey to the people I referred to earlier what services are available, and must establish facilities and services that would help people in filling out and filing their application. Furthermore, it should become the department's responsibility to motivate people to improve their position by actually telling them in plain and simple language, and showing them with pictures if necessary, the benefits of better living.

We all know, of course, that those benefits would bring with them a vast improvement in areas where we face the dilemma of only 3 per cent of the type of people I have referred to earlier achieving full utilization of our school system. We would find a vast improvement in health care and in the infant mortality rate, since people would have a chance to practice better body hygiene in their homes. The benefits I am referring to would have a profound

[Mr. Oberle.]

effect on the character building of our young people, who would not have to be ashamed any more of their social background. They would be given at best an equal chance because they would be experiencing, for the first time, pride of ownership and the satisfaction of personal achievement.

I realize that it would be physically impossible for the minister and his staff to fill this role without creating yet another bureaucratic monster which would eat up all the benefits, but I know from experience that there is a way by which we could achieve what I have talked about. To illustrate this, I wish to elaborate and explain to the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, what I mean. As mayor of a small municipality in northern British Columbia, I set out to find a solution to the problems that were facing not only the native but also the poor white people in and within the fringe area of our town. That was also the dilemma facing the municipality that people living in unbelievable substandard conditions not only identified with our town and used all the services and social amenities, our schools and hospitals, but did not contribute anything to help us pay for these services. I organized a social improvement committee and set out to build some homes for these people on land which the provincial government had made available for the purpose.

In order to achieve maximum benefits—the minister knows the project I am talking about; he has contributed immensely to it—it was decided that the people for whom the homes were to be built should be involved during the planning and construction stages and that they should end up owning the homes. We took a survey of services and loans available from the two senior governments and found that there were actually sufficient services available not only to put all the applicants into new homes but to assist the town financially by broadening its tax base and by increasing the per capita contribution by the province. But the greatest benefits gained by this experiment, as it was called by CMHC, was not the dollar value, of course, but the fact that for some participating families the chain that kept them on welfare for three generations will be broken.

The project is only two years old and already we know that most of the children will not follow in their parents' footsteps. Teachers are telling me that there is already a profound change in their attitude towards school. The doctors are telling me that there is already a marked difference in these families health care, and some of the young men and women are making contributions to service clubs and community services so essential to the way of life in the north. We must consider that almost all of the participants in this project were on welfare, and most of them had a deplorable social background. We must further consider that the only special service employed was a direct liaison between senior officials of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the people themselves, through the municipal council.

We asked the question why so many Canadians do not avail themselves of a proper home, a question I have asked many times. I asked that same question about a year ago while speaking to the annual conference of the Native Council of Canada in Ottawa. I asked why I was honoured to come to Ottawa to talk about what I thought