

Housing Prices

Opposition said that we had a tendency to play the game of blaming the constitution. With this agreement between the federal government, the provinces and the municipalities I am confident we will find a process by which we will ensure that the constitution is working for us rather than hindering us in co-ordinating policies among all levels of government.

There will be many opportunities during the next little while to debate housing and urban affairs policy, both in connection with Bill C-209 and in connection with the amendments to the housing act that I shall be introducing. There will be many opportunities to discuss the policies which we have now or will be applying during the tenure of office of this government as revealed in legislation offered to Parliament. This legislation is in terms of financial mechanisms to assure an adequate supply of capital for mortgage moneys, amendments to the National Housing Act and the progress made in terms of the tri-level consultative process, all of which are very important initiatives taken by this government and by myself during the short time I have been the minister responsible. I think this brief summary and forecast is a sufficient response to the resolution before the House. Other points which have been raised will be answered by other speakers during debate on specific legislation.

• (1500)

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to outline the government's achievements and policies in the housing field and to allow them to be compared with the alternatives offered recently in a public statement in Toronto by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield). I did not find much in that address, but one thing that startled me was his statement regarding the federal role. The Leader of the Opposition said the federal government's role was one of co-ordination and support. I agree with that statement, so far as it goes. We have a new tri-level process for co-ordination and we are now suggesting amendments to the National Housing Act designed to provide support to the provinces in their housing programs. It seems to me that the federal government has not only a co-ordinating and supporting role but also a leadership role.

It is the purpose of CMHC to introduce policies of imagination in a few days, and it is the purpose of my ministry of state for urban affairs to show leadership to the people of Canada in solving housing and urban affairs problems. It is a far greater role and purpose which we see for ourselves than that envisaged by the Leader of the Opposition. I can only say I am disappointed at the role picked out for the federal government by that hon. gentleman.

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the introduction of this motion caused the minister responsible for housing to react by making a statement in this House. It is pleasing to know he is now telling us about legislation to be introduced in respect of mortgage financing. He did not say when the amendments to the National Housing Act would be coming forward, but I hope we can deal with those at the same time. The opposition showed its co-operation two or three weeks ago when we passed within seven days two bills for the benefit of our senior citizens and veterans. If

[Mr. Basford.]

the bill to be introduced is good, I am sure it will receive early passage.

My main concern is for the low-income and no-income people. I am also concerned about the hundreds of millions of dollars produced by the government for housing. I agree that many houses are being built for the rich, but nothing is being done about housing for the poor and needy. It is necessary to recognize that housing is a primary social, economic and physical need, yet there persistently prevails all across Canada a severe shortage of family housing at reasonable prices. Thus the choice for large, low-income families is limited, causing them either to reduce spending on other needs or to accept housing well below normally accepted standards. As a rule, they cannot afford to become homeowners.

To alleviate this situation the federal government provides funds for low-income housing programs in distant and isolated areas. The provincial and municipal governments are establishing subsidized housing programs which more often than not produce social ghettos. As to private enterprise, it is continuing to serve mainly the socio-economic class which is least affected by the housing situation. A lasting improvement of the current housing situation requires a corresponding improvement of the social conditions which cause the situation.

I realize this is a long-term goal, but the housing of many Canadians is still below minimum acceptable standards. It is little wonder that there exist so many substandard houses in Canada. Sophisticated studies are not necessary to discover that there are still thousands of ill-housed Canadians. This Liberal government persists in one study after another. I will deal with this matter a little later.

There is one basic fact. Housing that is substandard, usually occupied by low-income families, should be improved or removed, with new homes built. The government in power must provide the funds and the direction to reach those people who are not being reached by present housing programs. Strangely enough, a quick perusal of the intentions of the government indicates much the same situation as that leaked in respect of the Charney report. These leaks were not as bad as many of the leaks I have seen in homes in my constituency, where people are living in embarrassing conditions of which we in Canada should be ashamed.

Public housing authorities now face larger problems than the straight provision of adequate physical structures. A social environment less damaged by noise, pollution and social stigma must also be provided. These problems can only be solved with greater understanding and participation by the three levels of government. Experimentation with such techniques as variable interest rates and terms, deferred equities and varying degrees of ownership should be used to encourage the private market to move into low-income housing. At the same time, this should provide encouragement to low-income families to purchase their own homes. Government plans in this regard have revealed only tokenism in the area of low-income families working toward home ownership.

We should investigate ways to permit low and middle-income families to borrow up to 100 per cent of the property cost and, where needed, they should be subsidized by the government to help pay for housing. By low income I