

Urgency of Housing Debate

I should like to refer the house to citation 100 (3) which states as follows:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but it means "urgency of debate", when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

I will leave it to the government to establish the earliest opportunity at which a debate on this subject can take place. When I say "the earliest opportunity" I do not mean in a month's time or next week. I mean this week either tomorrow or the day after. I am of the opinion that this should be the first subject discussed in the house because housing is in a critical state at the present time.

Mr. Bert Leboe (Cariboo): Mr. Speaker, may I say in very few words that we believe there is a real urgency of debate on this matter and that the government should be given an opportunity to tell us exactly what are its plans so far as housing is concerned. The reason I say this is that I believe we have a twofold program: first is the problem of the housing situation and second are the inflationary pressures which exist in the country at present. A great deal of money poured into housing will bring about an increase in the inflationary pressures. We should like to hear from the government how it intends to combat the inflation resulting from higher prices and still meet the needs of housing which is a matter of great importance. On this point alone I think it is essential that we hear from the government and that you, Mr. Speaker, give an opportunity for a debate to take place so that the government can give us a clear picture of how they intend to meet the present situation where a great deal of money must be spent on housing and yet the inflationary pressures must not be allowed to continue.

Hon. George Hees (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, the reason this matter is of urgency is that the period in which the situation can be corrected is very short because the construction season for this year will soon come to an end and by the end of this year, as a result of this government's lack of planning, close to 50,000 Canadian families will have inadequate housing to shelter them. This is a crisis. The government's housing program is actually running in reverse. In July we were given the last figures that the Dominion Bureau of Statistics makes available to the Canadian people. The number of housing starts in July was 7 per cent below the number of starts made in May and 14 per

[Mr. Langlois (Mégantic).]

cent below the number of starts made in August. This situation is steadily worsening. It has approached crisis proportions. Even if the starts were maintained for the rest of the year at the rate of the July starts instead of decreasing further, as they have been doing for the past two months, by the end of this year we would still be able to produce only 146,000 housing starts instead of the absolute minimum of 190,000 housing starts which the Canadian Economic Council has told us is the minimum required for this country this year.

Therefore we must have a debate on this matter today. The government's plan is not a plan. As I said, it is running in reverse. We are producing less houses month by month and by the end of the year 50,000 Canadian families will be without shelter. Obviously the government has no plans to put forward. It is therefore the duty of the opposition to present plans to the government, which we intend to do, and to suggest what the government should do to get the 190,000 houses built in a year which the Canadian Economic Council has stated is the absolute minimum. Therefore a debate on housing should be preceded with immediately and without delay.

Mr. B. S. Mackasey (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, despite your request at the beginning of this debate that we confine our remarks to the urgency of the debate and not to the subject matter itself, every speaker who has taken advantage of Rule 26 has of course discussed and emphasized the fact that there is a housing shortage in this country. I should like to consider myself intellectually honest to the point that I agree there is a housing shortage in Canada at present, but unlike some of the hypocritical statements which I have just heard, particularly those made by the leader of the New Democratic party, I recognize that in this country there is the B.N.A. Act and that under the constitution of Canada housing is a provincial matter. Although the socialists preach in favour of particular status for one part of the country and not for another they have no hesitation in laying at the feet of the federal government the complete responsibility for the housing shortage, thus denying to the provinces their jurisdiction in this field.

I may be out of order, Mr. Speaker, but so was the leader of the New Democratic party. I wish to point out that I am not as concerned with the shortage of housing in this country for people in the \$20,000 to \$25,000 income bracket who need homes as I am