

*National Housing Act*

● (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Joyal (Maisonneuve-Rosemont): Madam Speaker, I should like first of all to take part in this debate on the admissibility of the amendment introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Carter).

In my opinion, Madam Speaker, this amendment should be allowed. In fact, according to my interpretation of our standing orders, Beauséjour's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, and Bourinot's, no private member in this House may introduce an amendment which would result in either depriving the government of additional funds, or causing additional expenditures of funds by the government, which is precisely the purpose of my colleague's amendment. However, since 1957, and in 1958 in particular, a number of precedents were created in the House when a private member was allowed to introduce an amendment which resulted in either limiting the input of additional funds in the public treasury, or causing the government to spend more. And I feel the most recent instance is related to the last budget bill, when a number of amendments which had been introduced by opposition members were deemed in order by the Chair. Thus I believe, Madam Speaker, that the parliamentary procedure, as it is oriented now, generally expands the members' capacity to move amendments to this effect. In my opinion, we should support the one we have before us now.

On the other hand, as regards the very content of the amendment proposed by my hon. colleague, I am particularly anxious, Madam Speaker, to make my views known, because in my opinion the amendment deals with one of this government's most important priorities.

I would be remiss if, before getting to the content of the amendment, I did not reiterate certain statements of policy which have been recently stated anew by the Economic Council of Canada in their report entitled:

"Toward More Stable Growth in Construction"

The Economic Council of Canada pointed out specifically in their recommendation No. 7 that we should change appreciably our approach to the social housing problem. The council said, and I quote:

We recommend that future low-income housing efforts be organized and funded so as to ensure a smooth growth path over a period of years, on a regional basis, independent of any swings in other residential or nonresidential construction.

I agree with that approach and look forward to seeing the government pass a law putting it into force. Indeed, until now we have always insisted on having housing construction or housing starts follow economic fluctuations. In times of economic growth, the government holds back on its budgets; in times of economic stabilization, the government pours additional amounts into construction. This has often resulted in slowing down public housing; in the final analysis, the first to suffer the consequences are those Canadians whom my colleague described a while ago.

I should also point out to my colleague the Dennis-Fish report on the low-income housing market in Canada. This report, published in 1972, contains a passage I should like my colleagues to recall. It is a quotation taken from the

[Mr. Carter.]

report of the Castonguay-Nepveu Commission of Inquiry into Health and Welfare published in 1971.

I quote an extract which, I think, underlies the philosophy of the amendment proposed by my colleague in the House this afternoon. The Castonguay commission stated:

Therefore, to recognize access to housing as a universal right implies a direct intervention of the state in the whole industry which still today depends nearly entirely on private enterprise. As the universal access to education and care has required the state to take the responsibility of those sectors instead of private enterprise, so the recognition of the access to housing as a universal right implies a similar direct intervention in housing services.

Madam Speaker, I think it is important that our conception of the right to housing recognizes for every citizen of the country equal access to adequate housing conditions. And the amendment proposed by my colleague this afternoon underlies that philosophy which has been reaffirmed in two very recent reports tabled in this House.

Madam Speaker, I would like to draw your attention on a particular aspect of the amendment proposed by my colleague, namely the philosophy that is behind the joint program. As you are aware, Madam Speaker, our philosophy in the area of social housing has changed. In the past, when we realized that people in our country needed the support of the government to have adequate housing, we immediately thought in terms of high-rise housing for these people. In the sixties, this approach contributed to create what I call "the concentration of poverty".

One needs only visit the first projects which were implemented under those programs. I have a few in mind and I shall mention for instance the Dozois plan, in Montreal, which is now a strange thing in the city of Montreal, in the sense that we thought we could meet the needs of those people when we initiated such programs in a given area of particularly high density. So that at the same time were creating ghettos of poor in the city areas where private enterprise and the municipal and provincial governments were not able to provide decent housing for these people. Our philosophy has considerably changed because we realize today that the best way to respect adequate urban life conditions and, mostly, to protect a certain quality of urban life was to have a much more practical outlook on social housing.

Madam Speaker, the RRAP program is an application of this outlook. Indeed, one starts with the principle that, in its normal composition, the urban fabric must be respected. All of us who live in cities realize that on certain streets, we do not see only elderly people, younger people, middle-aged persons or citizens having the same profession. The urban fabric is very diversified in its composition and in its social origin; when a government considers social housing as a priority, it must respect the urban fabric. In renovating their districts, in ensuring that they do not literally rot down, in grappling with signs of ageing of neighbourhoods, small urban areas can protect their own urban fabric structure.

Madam Speaker, if you ever had the opportunity, like some of my colleagues, to visit certain European cities that were devastated during the last world war, you probably noticed as I did that those neighbourhoods are particularly monotonous. Indeed, all those neighbourhoods were rebuilt at the same time. Many of my colleagues pointed out very opportunely the monotony of suburban living.