

Concerning social housing, it seems appropriate to remind the House of three facts that were a real trauma for parliamentarians. They were largely brought to light by a group to which I would like to pay tribute. It is a pressure group called FRAPRU that is very well known in Montreal and the metropolitan area. It put in a lot of work over the last few years to try and convince us that we should make a firm commitment to social housing.

FRAPRU, which has its head office in the riding of Laurier—Sainte-Marie, committed itself in a document in which it gives a very detailed profile of social housing in Quebec and Canada. FRAPRU, which deserves the admiration and support of parliamentarians, reminds us that there are three types of data in this document. One of them points very strongly to the fact that, in Quebec, never before have so many families had to spend so much on social housing—an alarming situation. About 40 per cent of families in Quebec are in this situation. Never have so many people in Canada, not only in Quebec, had to spend so much of their income in order to have a decent home. We are talking of about 1.2 million people.

It is with these data in mind that we thought it necessary, as the Official Opposition, to urge the government to make substantial efforts to invest in social housing. Indeed, we are worried. I admit that worry is part and parcel of politics, but we are nevertheless seriously concerned about the intentions of this government. And we are not the only ones, for that matter. May I remind you that FRAPRU and other organizations interested in housing met the minister last December and that on the basis of that meeting, they concluded that the minister had not committed himself seriously and strongly enough, to say the least, to championing this cause in Cabinet. What we have in terms of social housing is far from satisfactory and encouraging.

We have little available in terms of social housing. Since in politics the ability to remember is a very precious asset, we should recall that the member from Papineau—Saint-Michel, the present Deputy Prime Minister and other big names of the former Official Opposition had passionately called for the re-establishment, among other things—and I am giving here a very concrete example—of the national co-operative housing program that cost only \$6 million to the government. It is very little compared to overall government spending.

Some members in the Official Opposition thundered and talked with deep conviction about social housing, but indeed, they have quieted down since. I suppose that the fact that they have changed sides in the House explains their silence. The only thing that we are left with in terms of social housing is a program which is, to use parliamentary language, modest but you will understand that this is not really the word I would rather use. This program which addresses a very small proportion of the housing problem deals with renovation but not any kind of

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renovation since it is open only to homeowners. As if the poor, as if people in our community who really need the government's assistance were homeowners!

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I believe that the government must maintain the program referred to since the beginning of this debate, but that this is largely insufficient. We are entitled, a few days away from the tabling of the budget—I hope we will not be disappointed—to expect that the government is going to re-establish the budgets approved in the past in the three sectors where one could, as a less fortunate member of society, expect to get some help in the social housing area.

What are the three programs which the federal and provincial governments jointly administered in the past? First, the National Co-operative Housing Program, which was very inexpensive for the government and had tremendous advantages. I will have an opportunity to come back to that. Second, the Income Supplement Program, which was a way to intervene on the rental market and to help people. The resources there were meagre, but they proved effective. Third, a more complex and more expensive low-cost housing program. Housing authorities in each municipality operate according to very specific rules. When one talks about low-cost housing, we all know here—because our television viewers know it—that this formula allows them to spend 25 p. 100 of their income in order to get a decent housing unit in which to live and to belong to a community from whom they are entitled to expect some help. And, as a general rule, support is available.

At the same time as the low-cost housing program, the federal government, with the provinces, had been assisting non-profit organizations that were dealing with a very specific clientele, mostly handicapped people, people losing their autonomy, ex-prisoners or people with AIDS. In the past, there was a program that allowed to help a very specific clientele.

So, at this time, even if we are being enthusiastic—I am not a pessimist by nature—we do not have much indication about the will of the government to act and to play a major role in these areas, still in co-operation with the provinces. You know that, on this side of the House, we will not forget that.

Why did we feel, as the Official Opposition, that we needed to be insistent? This has to do not only with the poverty issue. Indeed, we are concerned with it because we know that more and more people are getting poorer, but also because we believe—and that is the fundamental difference between us and our friends from the Reform Party. There are other differences, and I will not mention them, but this is certainly one of them. We are convinced that when you act in the social housing area, when there are public funds, when you make a budget, when you provide money to act in that area, you are being useful and you