

Supply—Labour

effectively. I am certainly prepared to support a new federal initiative and I am sure this applies also to many other members on this side of the house. I ask members of the Conservative opposition, who so recently in national convention approved the two nation doctrine to tell us whether they are prepared to accept federal responsibility in the field of public housing. And what about the members of the N.D.P. who, when in the province of Quebec, preach so fervently the gospel of special status? Are they prepared to accept the principle of federal responsibility?

Up to the present time parliament has taken the view that the provision of sufficient public housing is essentially a welfare matter within the constitutional jurisdiction of the provinces and their municipalities. I contend that this view is long outdated. For example, the housing crisis in Toronto results from the fact that people from all parts of the province of Ontario, from other parts of Canada and from countries outside our borders are flocking into the city. The population of Toronto in recent years has been expanding at about the fastest rate of any large city on the continent. It has almost two million people. More immigrants have come to the Toronto area than to any other part of the country. The public housing crisis in Toronto has resulted from this influx of people from all parts of the world. It is the policy, and correct policy, of this government, to encourage immigration. Immigrants must find some place to live. They must find housing.

Surely it is now entirely clear that under existing conditions the provision of public housing in the large rapidly growing urban areas is a question of national urgency involving the peace, order and good government of Canada. Until parliament accepts this responsibility it is idle and mischievous for opposition members to attack the government for not taking action which parliament has not yet authorized. I challenge the Conservative and N.D.P. opposition members to cease their carping criticism and to stand up and tell the house and the Canadian people where they stand on this vital issue of federal government responsibility and authority.

● (5:50 p.m.)

Mr. Graftey: Are you being serious?

Mr. Scott (Danforth): That is what we have said for years.

Mr. Wahn: I hope that in the remainder of this debate members of all parties in this house will accept the principle that the provision of public housing in our large urban

centres is not a welfare measure and therefore of local concern but a matter of national urgency and importance.

Mr. Scott (Danforth): Why do not do something about it then?

Mr. Wahn: I feel confident that if parliament will accept the federal responsibility, effective action can be taken without constitutional change. It must be recognized, however, that in addition to federal responsibility there is a provincial and municipal responsibility and that there must be a co-operative effort among the three levels of government.

Mr. Scott (Danforth): Would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Wahn: When I am finished. A means can and must be found to cut through the red tape and to put an end to the buck-passing among the three levels of government which has limited action up to the present time. We must try to pinpoint the reasons why federal funds have not been used so far and then decide how we can make action effective in the future.

I suggest to the members of this house that the most fundamental reason why federal public housing funds have not been fully used up to the present time is that additional public housing in the large urban municipalities such as Toronto, which need public housing most, will under existing conditions impose an additional, unwarranted and indeed unbearable burden on the home owner. Independent studies make it entirely clear the urban home owner at the present time is bearing an unfair and regressive tax burden. If Toronto or any other urban municipality wishes to use federal public housing funds, it must be prepared to put up a small percentage of the capital cost itself. It is a small percentage but it does involve some additional burden.

Much more important, however, are the hidden charges upon the municipality resulting from public housing. These include the cost of providing water mains, sewage systems and municipal services of all kinds, and particularly schools for the large numbers of children in the public housing projects. Again federal legislation makes federal money available for certain services such as sewage systems. Nevertheless, public housing does impose an additional and unfair burden upon the municipal taxpayer. Moreover, municipal