

Supply

concern these days is that the Government seems to forget about the ever increasing number of youths, women and even entire families without a roof over their heads.

Liberal Members have never missed an opportunity to rise in the House and urge the Conservative government to intervene. Unfortunately this Government worries more about the deficit than it does about human beings. You see, Mr. Speaker, homeless people do not vote, they have no address, they have no political clout. During the conference held for the international year people wanted to sit down and settle various problems. This is how people responsible for social housing, social agencies, industry and construction were prepared to set their own interests aside in an attempt to solve this problem. The federal Government did not get involved in the September 1987 homeless conference, and it still does not want to get involved. This is tragic because the federal Government is the only level which has the moral power and mandate to get people to work together to find short-, medium-, and long-term solutions.

• (1540)

[English]

I have newspaper headlines here which prove the Government does not take housing problems seriously. From *The Toronto Star*: "No one should have to live like this. Desperate mother of two lives in rundown house and says she doesn't know where to turn." Again, *The Toronto Star*: "Housing crisis taking toll on kids." From the St. John's *Evening Telegram*: "All women facing common housing difficulties. Housing too scarce and too expensive."

[Translation]

The Conservative Government also missed the boat when it comes to people living in substandard housing units. These people are Canadians sitting on the fence, as it were: they do have a roof over their heads, but they may become homeless or be forced to move into dilapidated housing, with all the social, family and psychological consequences that entails. There are many reasons why a tenant might be forced to vacate the premises, including chronic unemployment, marital violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, and family problems to name a few. The Government does not deal with such problems, not to mention the fact that social programs have been weakened ever since it took office. Homeless people find it hard to understand how a Government can hand out close to \$1 billion to the Commercial Bank of Canada and the National Northland Bank to save them from bankruptcy, yet the same Government cannot seem to find any money for the homeless.

Now a few words about social and co-operative housing. The number of social and co-operative housing units has also gone down. The Minister and I can argue about the figures, but the number did go down because needs are greater.

The Conservative Government has preferred to reduce its involvement by choosing to set up a rent supplement plan, leaving the way free to private enterprise. In cities like

Toronto, even private enterprise cannot supply affordable housing, for several reasons. In fact, under the new definition of essential needs, the poorest Canadians do not receive government assistance—only the very poorest of the poor do.

The limit set for essential needs is unrealistic and should be revised by the Government. This is another sign that the Government would rather reduce its deficit than help the poorly housed.

• (1550)

[English]

Another area where the Government is failing hopelessly is the area of Indian housing. Indians have by far the worst housing conditions in Canada. Overcrowding is a major problem, and 7.5 per cent of all family households on reserve are made up of more than one family living in it, while the average for non-Indian households is only 1.4 per cent. The proportion of dwellings on reserve requiring major repair is 23 per cent, 37 per cent of dwellings have inadequate bathrooms and 37 per cent have no bathrooms at all. Fifty per cent of all dwellings on reserve have no central heating, one of the causes for so many respiratory ailments among Indians.

Also related to poor housing standards is the death rate for Indians from infections and parasite diseases, which is higher than in the non-Indian population. Lack of adequate housing also means that the number of Indian children in care or in custody of institutions, group or foster homes is high because bands lack adequate housing space to accommodate them. Although the need for Indian housing is very important, officials from Indian Affairs testified in committee that housing funds have remained static since 1984. It is the same story for any Canadian who lacks proper housing. The consequences are reflected in poor mental, psychological, physical and moral health.

We can also see the federal Government's lack of perspective and orientation in the City of Toronto. The Toronto housing market is a difficult one, with housing prices skyrocketing. But what does the federal Government do about it, Mr. Speaker? It contributes to the problem by holding parcels of land that could be used for social or affordable housing. I made a statement in this House the other day about that under Standing Order 21.

In a press release by Public Works it was announced that a sale of federal property had yielded over \$170 million. That sale was to reduce the number of surplus federal properties and to help bring down the federal deficit. Some of these properties or lands could have been used for homeless people or some of the money could have gone to help house the homeless, but the Government chose not to intervene. The question is, why did the Government not initiate such arrangements? The answer is very clear for all those who care about social housing. This Government is probably the least progressive Government in Canada when it comes to housing policies.