

Suggested Lack of Urban Policy

States, although their cities are presently facing a horrendous problem because of the increased rate of urban growth. I should not be surprised if we were not something like a century behind some of the European countries. We could learn a lot from countries such as Britain and Sweden. We could learn from the establishment of integrated cities such as Hemel Hempstead which is a satellite of London. The British government has made a decision that London shall not grow any more. It has recognized that if London were to grow further the quality of life in the city would deteriorate.

I commend the New Democratic Party for raising this subject. I think it is one of vital concern to Canadians and I believe this is the place in which we, as Canadians, should decide what our destiny is to be. We should not simply cringe in front of the charts which the economists and others place before us as if we were rabbits cringing before a snake, when they tell us that our country is destined to be 95 per cent metropolitan by the year 2,000, or something of that sort.

Mr. Martin P. O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, I propose to participate very briefly in the debate this afternoon. I think the issue we are confronting is a most important one. Many hon. members have described the nature of the difficulties faced by urban centres across Canada and, indeed, in most countries, and some have offered solutions to them. I should like to consider the question from a different perspective, that is, as being an inter-governmental responsibility. Approaching it from this point of view I should like to speak in general terms about some major trends which are taking place, trends which, if we accept their bearing on this issue, open up opportunities for an inter-governmental approach which affords some prospect of resolving certain of the major problems affecting our urban centres.

Some of these trends may appear to be distant from the particular issue we are discussing, but I suggest they do have a bearing on the situation. The first to which I draw attention is the realignment now being attempted by the federal government, in conjunction with provincial governments, with respect to social security matters.

Twenty-five years of federal initiative in the social security field put heavy strains on the provinces, both with respect to their pri-

orities and to their finances. It seems to me the proposal to de-emphasize the federal role in social security matters, to withdraw that heavy pressure on the provinces by passing to them the continuing responsibility, together with fiscal capacity to deal with it, releases the federal government to undertake new initiatives, principally in the urban field. There will be some filling in to be accomplished and new arrangements in social security to be worked out with a continuing federal participation, but the weight of the leading federal role can be lifted. I suggest this trend opens a door to new initiatives here without imposing unduly on provincial prerogatives. Second, it seems to me that the tendency to resist fiscal transfers from the federal to the provincial governments associated with a real effort to bring about amendments to the constitution is a trend favourable to new federal initiatives affecting urban affairs.

● (5:30 p.m.)

There is no point at all in devolving additional revenues upon systems that are not in a position to utilize them effectively. There is no point in doing more of the same. It seems to me that resistance to these transfers while seeking constitutional change is a healthy development and may be turned to use in the urban context. One would also hope that by entrenching certain rights in the constitution, particularly those relating to language and education, the constitution would be rendered so much more flexible that with guarantees given in those fields by the expressed will of all Canadians the provinces would see some virtue in amendments being made in other areas of the constitution, particularly in areas where the federal government could assume concurrent or shared powers to give it a more legitimate role in urban affairs rather than trying to come in through the back door.

The final trend to which I would draw attention is of a general nature, namely, the accelerating trend toward regional government, about which I will say more in a moment. This latter trend is sponsored by the provinces. What must be the main conditions for a better, intergovernmental approach to urban problems? First, I think the approach must be through urban regions rather than directed toward cities themselves. I suggest that if the concept of an urban centre is that of a city standing free, separated from its environment, separated from the rural areas, the notion is obsolete. It is quite impossible to