

Discussion on Housing

or pay \$50,000 for a new house. I am thinking of those who are making between \$5,000 and \$6,000 a year and for whom the cost of housing is becoming so great that they cannot afford to maintain even the minimum standards which any civilized country ought to be providing.

[Translation]

Hon. Martial Asselin (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I should like in turn to make a small contribution to this debate by discussing a situation which is becoming increasingly alarming: the housing crisis.

This crisis, Mr. Speaker, did not arise within the last week. It has been with us for several months and the government, of course, as always, intends to pass legislation and assume its responsibilities only in critical moments. Since 1965, when the present government was re-elected, it has passed legislation sporadically, in times of crisis, and that is why today the members of this house and the Canadian people are faced with a serious, important and urgent situation.

We owe this debate, of course, Mr. Speaker, to the action of the official opposition which, since the reopening of the session, has been proposing the adjournment of our regular business in order to deal with this very important matter. Faced with the refusal of the Chair to grant us this adjournment, we introduced the amendment now before the house.

• (4:20 p.m.)

If the government are faced with such a critical situation with respect to housing, they have nobody to blame but themselves because we never missed the opportunity in former sessions to remind them that they should take stronger measures with regard to the housing crisis and that they should deal with it without delay.

Of course, the crisis has now grown worse and not only the opposition but all information media are unanimous in recognizing that it was high time for the government to take action.

At this stage, I will refer the house to an article written by Mr. Roger Champoux in the Wednesday, September 27, 1967 issue of *La Presse* where, speaking of the housing crisis, he wrote:

We come right after the United States—

As far as the high cost of housing is concerned,

—which puts us not far from the top, in other words in the prohibitive price bracket. New housing costs a fortune to build; it is barely completed

when taxes fall on it like a cloud of grasshoppers. Result: the lessee pays three times what it is worth. Houses of some years standing are the object of such mysterious dealings that before long only people of means can afford them.

And the article goes on in the same vein. The author explains that the housing situation in Canada, and especially in Quebec, has come to a very serious turning-point.

Mr. Speaker, the recommendations of the Economic Council of Canada have been quoted extensively during our discussions. Of course, the minister does not seem very happy when we quote the report of the Economic Council and when it was tabled in the house, at the beginning of this debate, he quite rightly criticized the Economic Council for putting forth nice theories, for giving good advice without suggesting solutions. Obviously, the Economic Council of Canada is not the government. In our parliamentary system, in our democratic system it is not up to the opposition or to the Economic Council to make decisions, it is up to those who have the responsibility of administering the country, that is the government.

But I hardly think that the minister can set aside the annual review of the Economic Council whose purpose is precisely to try to inform the administration, that is the government, on the various problems related to the economy of the country.

On this subject, Mr. Speaker, on the housing crisis, I should recall very briefly the summary of the observations of the Economic Council of Canada which may be found on page 24 of the annual review, and I quote:

To put these developments into quantitative perspective, it may be noted that the number of new housing starts rose from 126,000 units in 1961 to 166,000 in 1964—

At this stage, Mr. Speaker, may I digress to say that during this debate members of the government have several times asked us: "What did you do when you were in power?" Well, looking at the figures of the Economic Council, it will be found that there has been a considerable increase from 1961 to 1964—I think we were still in power in 1963 and the report also says:

—but there was no increase in housing starts between 1964 to 1965, while a sharp decline (of about 20 per cent) occurred in starts between 1965 and 1966.

The Conservative party was not in power in 1964, 1965, 1966. It was the Liberal party, the people now sitting across from us.

—over the whole period 1961-1966, the growth in the physical volume of housing construction