

Federal Co-operation in Urban Problems

An hon. Member: Especially in the minds of the young.

Mrs. MacInnis: We are beginning to realize the social costs of keeping poverty. The Lithwick study refers to the way in which women heads of families are rendered particularly immobile because we have no day-care system to help them. The elderly, the handicapped, the unemployed and chronically ill are chained remorselessly to their situation by lack of income. They are chained with all the cruelty of chains in a medieval dungeon. Their options are non-existent and their numbers are growing. If the minister will not use the National Housing Act to provide day-care facilities in each project or, where that is not desirable, in community centres nearby, he should do something which would cause his name to be inscribed on bronze plates around Vancouver. I would take pleasure in seeing that he got one or two.

• (2140)

What about the dollars and cents cost of keeping poverty? The welfare system at all levels costs the Canadian taxpayer more than \$6 billion a year. The Senate Committee on Poverty said:

The welfare system, at all levels, costs Canadians more than six billion a year, yet it has not significantly alleviated poverty let alone eliminated it. The problems grow; costs go up and up and will, in time, suffocate the taxpayer. The welfare system is increasingly unable to deal with the needs of its clients. It has failed to achieve its humanitarian goals. It deprives its recipients of dignity and provides no incentive or rewards to escape from poverty. It has become punitive and demeaning. It is a mess—a social wasteland and an economic morass.

So much for the Senate Committee on Poverty. Poverty is a waste, an intolerable frustration and a soul-destroying torture to those caught in the morass. We can no longer afford it. The only way to wipe it out is to provide income for the poor. All the housing reports say so, a decent income based on the cost of living index and rising with it. Along with this must go opportunities for useful activity in the community according to the measure of one's ability to serve.

My earnest suggestion to the minister is that he approach his colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) and any other colleagues necessary with a view to finding ways and means of building an income floor beneath which no Canadian will be allowed to fall. In my view, this would be a major step in dealing with one of the most serious urban problems, the problem of poverty and insufficient income. It would lighten enormously the burden of the minister in dealing with other urban problems if he could make a frontal attack on this core problem of poverty. It is not going to stay in the core; it will spread in ever-widening circles to get people enslaved.

There is also the problem of urban traffic. I feel sure that in his heart the minister knows we should now consider the moving of people rather than providing endless transport facilities for cars. I feel certain he realizes that to divide and destroy neighbourhoods by great, noisy freeways is to move away from the dreams of a society of exceptional excellence. The remarks of the minister at various times in Vancouver have shown that he is aware of a rising feeling in the community, that what is immediately required is not a third crossing of Burrard Inlet which would benefit only a limited number of citizens, but

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

a well planned system of rapid transit which would serve the whole metropolitan area. Why then does he not involve himself as Minister of Urban Affairs? He must involve himself because some of his colleagues are taking the opposite side of the coin and saying that we must have a third crossing of Burrard Inlet. They say this must be the first priority. The minister owes it to the people of this country to take the initiative and say where he stands.

The minister has talked of the need for rapid transit. He has indicated that even though a certain portion of the population wants a third crossing, Ottawa should not be content to give a grant for it but should use it for rapid transit if the majority wants that. Why, then, as Minister of Urban Affairs can he not become involved and take the initiative in getting that rapid transit system instead of the third crossing?

The minister has talked of the need for tripartite consultation and planning in these matters. Let him now take the initiative and convene a meeting of the other levels of government to discuss the best course to follow from the standpoint of the whole community rather than that of special groups and interests. I am sure that such action on his part would be infinitely more impressive than hours of talk about the need for co-operation.

If the minister announced that he was seeking the co-operation of provincial and municipal authorities for this purpose, I am sure that neither of those levels of government would dare refuse him a meeting. If he does not do that, he is open to a charge of fence-sitting and staying clear because he wants to stand well with certain groups and interests. He can smile pleasantly and look like the smiling Buddha all he likes, but the people are likely to discover that smiling Buddha is not what they need right now. They want a man of action, a man who will act in the interest of the whole community of Vancouver, someone who is not afraid even if he is called a hamburger by the head of the city or runs the risk of being called a bigot by the premier of that province. I do not know the danger in that regard.

In my view, in addition to tripartite consultation there should be a fourth level, those interested community groups which are becoming the counterweight to the pressures of special privilege which exist on every hand. We discovered the value of such volunteer community groups during the debate of the Canada Water Act when the efforts of anti-pollution groups all across Canada succeeded in stopping the great detergent companies from continuing to ruin the waterways with high concentrations of phosphates. In that instance, the then Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources was exceedingly glad of the pressure of those volunteer groups which helped to get the anti-phosphate provision into the Canada Water Act.

This minister can, if he will, discover the value of such voluntary groups in the stiff battles that lie ahead to preserve and improve the quality of urban environment. He should welcome the pressures which have fought for things like keeping the quality of the environment in the entrance to Stanley Park and preventing such horrors as the Four Seasons which would block the entrance to Stanley Park, cut off the view and make the traffic far more contested at that point that it would otherwise be.

Mr. Basford: I fixed all that up last week.