

National Housing Act

has remained in that category, an unwanted child to be kept in a stunted state and put in the most undesirable light possible.

The former minister in charge of housing explained the rationale for providing public housing as a chance for the poor "to get the dental bill paid, the grocery bills paid and some of the debts cleaned off and you could save a little dough and get out of public housing." If one of those things is desirable it would be "to get out of public housing" because the people in public housing know that there is precious little chance of getting the dental and grocery bills paid and saving a little dough. These things are quite impossible in their circumstances.

In Canada the term "public housing" is a dirty word. It has always been applied to low rental ghettos and never to places like Rideau Hall or 24 Sussex Drive, where it could be applied with equal accuracy although with a more sweet aroma. What we need, it seems to me, is more and better public housing—public housing that will accommodate a wide mix of our citizens instead of cooping together in very narrow quarters families on social assistance whose lives have become a series of well-nigh insoluble problems for themselves as well as for others in the community. That is the reason for this amendment.

I want to go a little bit further afield, Mr. Speaker, and I hope you will indulge me because I have taken very little of the time of this House in recent days, having been otherwise engaged. In introducing his bill at second reading, the minister spoke eloquently of the needs of people for housing going beyond the minimum needs of shelter. I want to quote him because the minister never said anything that was more to my taste than this:

In considering people's need for shelter, however, we cannot concern ourselves simply with a roof and four walls. Man is a social animal and we must look beyond his house to the community of which it is a part. The community, as well as the house, must be safe and healthy and must allow and encourage man and his family to achieve the fullest possible growth and development, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

I should like to take a few moments now, Mr. Speaker, to emphasize the need for this approach, not only in the building of new public housing, whether by municipalities or any other agency, but in the making of older existing public housing projects more liveable. Those of us with such projects in our constituency know only too well that initially the tenants had nothing in the way of amenities except a roof, four walls and the barest necessities for housekeeping. We know that there have been precious few opportunities to discuss this matter and that is the reason I want to do it for a few minutes now.

Here were human beings, people with all the normal needs for space and privacy, recreational and personal development—tot lots and play spaces for their children, rooms for meetings and activity programs of all kinds—cooped together in little boxes for beds with an eating area thrown in as an extra. Being on low income, such families had neither the money to pay for transportation to community centres nor the money needed for the programs and sports equipment when they got there. No wonder there were complaints of broken windows, anti-social behaviour of various kinds, tension and trouble among tenants and with the surrounding community. The wonder

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway).]

is that there was so little disturbance arising from so much heartbreak and sense of injustice.

● (1610)

Long years of struggle have succeeded in securing some of the more rudimentary recreation facilities in some of the projects. However, of what use is a hall unless there is also trained leadership for activities that are so badly needed in it? Lack of trained leadership and the frustration that results are the makings of mischief for teenagers whose abounding energies must have outlets, good or bad. It is these things which continue to give public housing the bad name it has today. As the member for a constituency with a number of public low rental projects, I have increasingly felt the need for the provision of proper recreational leadership in the projects. This is a responsibility of the federal government as well as the other levels of the government. Such leadership must not be imposed from outside. Rather, it must result from the co-operation of housing management and tenants' associations. Only in this way can the kinds of recreational programs needed in each project be determined and carried on successfully.

This sort of co-operation and programming would go far toward removing the stigma that is now attached to living in public housing. It is a stigma that arises from poverty, not merely poverty of material goods, but the starvation of the spirit that results from being unable to share in the creative experiences of play, handicraft, purposeful programs, growing experience and breadth of interest. Citizens not able to share in these experiences are cut off from others, no matter how fine the public housing may be, whether it was built by CMHC, co-operatives or anything in between. Co-operatives however, do not do that sort of thing. They consider the tenants because it is they, the tenants, who make the decisions.

More public housing, including a much greater social and income mix and more help for tenants in creating modern recreation of various types, is my reason for supporting this amendment which is designed to help our municipalities become more involved in helping people secure homes in communities of which they can be justly proud. It is in this light that I consider this amendment to be very relevant to the problem of providing good housing to low income people. Having seen the light, I hope the minister will do his very best to see that this amendment is accepted and put into effect in the later stages of this legislation.

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, from the committee proceedings and the speeches we have heard this afternoon, I realize that the amendment moved by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) has some appeal. I must admit that when it was moved in the first instance in committee, it had a good deal of appeal to me. At that time, I thought there would be no difficulty in accepting the amendment. However, after some thought and consultation, I feel there are good and valid reasons for the existing provisions of Bill C-133 and good and valid reasons for opposing this amendment which I know was moved with the greatest of sincere sentiment and for the same purpose I have, namely getting more housing built.