

Private Members' Business

• (1840)

[English]

At the end of the day we expect to identify savings that can be reinvested in social housing, to keep the existing social housing stock in good repair and to allow for new commitments. Our commitment to social housing must not simply be measured in terms of public expenditure. We have to look at housing within the broader and more comprehensive context of market forces and overall economic and social policy.

Along with the provinces, territories and interested stakeholders, we will be taking action to ensure that rules and regulations do not impede the creation of affordable housing. We will ensure that housing policies and programs encourage people to seek new opportunities to break out of the poverty cycle.

We want to ensure that the private market is able to provide affordable housing for Canadians. We are currently looking into new financial instruments which will increase access to housing for Canadians. We are also considering reintroducing indexed link mortgages for co-operatives.

[Translation]

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides): Madam Speaker, again today, I have the opportunity to rise to ask the Liberal government to act quickly to respond to the pressing housing needs of 1,200,000 Canadians.

So far, the representations and lobbying by community organizations, by members of the Official Opposition and even by some members across the floor who have shown a little interest and resolve, have yielded nothing. Zero, zilch. Since January of this year, the government has invested nothing at all in social housing programs. Low-cost housing, non-profit organizations, co-operative housing were completely neglected and forgotten by the Liberals. In fact, the members opposite do nothing else but close their eyes and renew the policies of the Conservatives. This attitude on the part of the Liberals is shameful and totally unacceptable. Do they not remember that, not so long ago, when they were the Official Opposition, they spent a lot of time condemning the Conservative government for withdrawing funding for social housing? Do they not remember that?

And that is not all. The Liberals said that they wanted to work together with housing organizations in order to establish a national policy on social housing. They even promised to fully restore all programs. The Minister of Finance even wrote this in a letter to various organizations dated September 22, 1993, and I quote: "There is no doubt that a Liberal government will ensure funding for these sectors. We think that the state must adopt a positive and dynamic national policy in this area. It is incumbent on general management to ensure that over one million Canadian families are provided with decent and affordable housing".

The minister ended that letter by stating, and again I quote: "to that end, we wish to establish new partnerships with your organizations. I believe that over the past three years, our leader, our members of Parliament as well as our official critic for social housing, Joe Fontana, have consistently showed our commitment to social housing. We therefore rely on your co-operation on this socio-economic issue, which is of the highest importance", and I stress "of the highest importance". The letter is signed Paul Martin. Those are the words our dear Minister of Finance wrote on September 22 last.

Where are they today, those members of Parliament, this leader and this official critic, to show their commitment to social housing? They have vanished! Gone too are all those lovely speeches and the will to provide decent housing to needy families.

But what happened since then? Why did the members opposite completely change their mind? It is unacceptable and dishonest for elected and accountable people to alter their course in mid-stream. How can the population now seriously believe the Minister of Finance? How can he live with the words he wrote without feeling shame, without feeling any remorse? The minister looks a bit silly today and his credibility is no better than his social housing programs which deserve a big zero. They call him the sinister Minister of Finance.

• (1845)

And yet, the needs are obviously huge and urgent. The Canada, I repeat, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation estimates that 1,200,000 families are in urgent need of housing. How can you ignore this reality? How can you ignore such glaring statistics? The members opposite so free with their promises have no vision. All they are good at is damage control. They are unable to plan for the long term. They do not manage anything, they only hope and wait for things to get better on their own.

They put nothing on the table, no plan, no policy to deal with the housing crisis. In the meantime, people in substandard housing are waiting. They are hoping that the Liberal government will be true to its promises and will immediately provide funds to build low-rent housing, as well as non-profit and co-op housing. Hundreds of thousands of families find this wait increasingly hard to take. Several of them spend more than 50 per cent of their income on rent. Such poverty has devastating effects.

Every month, these poor families living in substandard housing have to make inhuman choices. Every month, in order to pay for their rent, they have to deprive their children of such essentials as food. Children go hungry and live in substandard housing because the government is not acting responsibly. This projects a very bad image in a society as affluent and developed as ours.