

Housing

the establishment, the growth and the natural and orderly development of major Canadian cities.

Of course, the Canadian government owns numerous properties in all major cities such as harbours, airports, office buildings, national parks, post offices, warehouses, penitentiaries, customs and excise buildings. All such buildings are found, if not in the core, on the outskirts of cities and have a considerable impact on the general development of large cities.

The government insists that all those urban properties serve the people and comply with the major policies and master plans advocated by the municipal authorities themselves. There was, therefore, a need for a ministry to coordinate federal activities in the cities, and such is the role played by the Department of Urban Affairs. It is a complementary rather than a priority role and it is subordinate to the master plans advocated first and foremost by the municipalities and the provinces.

We certainly do not intend to interfere in jurisdictional issues and try to take away from the municipalities and the provinces their crucial function. However, it is important to be fully aware, particularly in this House, of the fact that the Canadian government has a complementary role to play. Often that complementary role contributes to a better master plan and allows a municipality to undertake urban planning studies that it could not have done alone. But with subsidies from the Ministry of Urban Affairs, those cities and municipalities undertake these studies and thus enable their citizens to enjoy a better urban environment.

I think that regardless of the remarks made by the hon. member, regardless of the questions asked recently concerning the administrative reform carried out within the Ministry of Urban Affairs, I can state categorically that it was never intended to make basic changes in the ministry's function. We intend rather to make a more rational and orderly use of our departmental staff so that it can provide a more efficient service to municipalities.

It has also been said that this government's record in the housing field has been more or less impressive. Yet, the figures prove the contrary. After consulting the municipalities, the provinces and those responsible in the housing field, large builders associations like UDAC for instance, have determined that we needed about one million new housing units within the next four years. Now that building program of one million new housing units in Canada is already under way. In order to reach that target, we have set up an assisted home ownership program through which we give a fairly large subsidy to individuals, particularly young couples, who wish to buy their first home.

We have made every possible effort to urge contractors to build not only medium-cost homes in order to meet the needs of the more fortunate who do not really need government assistance to become homeowners, but also low-cost homes to make home ownership easier for thousands of young Canadian families who wish to own their own homes. Now I can say—the figures speak volumes and are irrefutable—that we are reaching our target of one million new housing units based on

[Mr. Ouellet.]

a four-year period. We will reach that target and at last enable Canadians to realize that very legitimate dream for every citizen to live in his own house if he so wishes.

One cannot help but note that over the years the housing sector has made tremendous progress in Canada. The so-called housing problem of the late 60s is no longer that serious today. Nobody can talk seriously of any housing problem in this country. There is no such problem.

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For some citizens of course it is harder to get low cost housing, and I must say in that respect that the Canadian government has asked for close provincial cooperation in an overall review of the economic housing situation in Canada. This in my view should be our main goal, more housing units for low income people and senior citizens. If there is an area that may possibly be somewhat critical that would be it.

But all in all, I have no hesitation in stating that Canadian housing is indeed better than in any other nation. We have in Canada the best built, the most highly subsidized housing in the best environment in the world. It is a fact that the Canadian government, through a series of programs, helps Canadians pay cheaper rents or assists them in owning a home at reduced interest rates, thanks to very significant subsidies. I challenge opposition members to find anywhere in the world a more advantageous series of housing subsidy programs.

Certainly there has been in recent years a significant drop in the crowding index. The number of units with more than one person per room dropped some 20 per cent to 5 per cent only over the last 15 years. While 43 per cent of building units occupied in Canada had no running water, hot or cold, in the early 50's, the proportion has now dropped to an approximate 3 per cent. Figures are similar for units without water closets, they dropped from some 35 per cent in the early 50s to 3 per cent only. As far as bathrooms and showers are concerned, the figures were 43 per cent in the early 50's and 5 per cent at this point. All data concerning basic conveniences conform to that general trend, which confirms in my view that Canadian housing is among the best in the world. The hon. member for Ottawa-Carleton (Mrs. Pigott) says this is due to private enterprise. My suggestion is this is due to private enterprise, the initiative of Canadians and the help and support of the Canadian government.

The fundamental role of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation is indeed to guarantee loans to builders and private enterprise, so they can build the type of units that put Canadian housing among the best in the world. I state emphatically that the hon. member is in error, probably unwittingly, when she implies that the Canadian government housing policy has failed to meet the stated objectives and does not fill the peoples' needs. I am certain the hon. member is in error because she is new here, and probably she did not have time enough to review all the programs aimed at meeting the housing needs of our Canadian citizens.

Perhaps it would be useful if I sent her again this information kit published by the Central Mortgage and Housing