

cally, how does the Canadian government obtain reliable information now from South Viet Nam since the embassy has been closed and all diplomatic and immigration personnel are withdrawn?

Mr. Sharp: We put a question to the government of the United States, which still has a mission in Viet Nam, and the information we received was that up to the time we had made the inquiry, which was yesterday, there had been no change. Permission was still being denied.

Mr. Stanfield: So, the government of Canada is now dependent on the United States government for information from South Viet Nam?

Mr. Woolliams: It always has been.

Mr. Stanfield: The embassy of Great Britain has made strenuous and apparently successful efforts to obtain permission for members of their staff who are Vietnamese citizens to leave the country. Has the Acting Prime Minister any explanation for this in view of the apparent failure of the government of Canada to obtain similar permission?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, our embassy has made very strong representations to Vietnamese authorities and had been doing so over a period of many days before the withdrawal. I understand that the British government has a different arrangement with respect to their locally employed staff: after the locally employed staff has been working some time with the British government, they are provided passports. That is not possible under Canadian law.

VIET NAM—GOVERNMENT ACTION TO AID VIETNAMESE
WISHING TO COME TO CANADA

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, according to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration some 1,908 Vietnamese families have authority to come to Canada. My question to the Acting Prime Minister is: what is the government doing at the present time to find out exactly how many of these people are now in receipt of permission from whatever is left of the Saigon authority to leave the country?

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Before the Canadian embassy was withdrawn, we had made representations on innumerable occasions on behalf of relatives of Canadian Vietnamese in Canada or who are here on landed immigrant status, to such a point that Vietnamese authorities asked us not to issue authority for these individuals to come to Canada because the Vietnamese authorities said that we were just raising false expectations. They did not intend to give exit permits.

Mr. McGrath: A supplementary question. In view of what now appears to be the total breakdown of what is left of the government of South Viet Nam and in view of the fact that there are almost 2,000 Vietnamese with permits to come to Canada, is the government going to use its good offices in Hanoi and with the PRG—by virtue of our experience with the truce commission—to make an appeal to have these people come to Canada in anticipation of the total collapse of the South Vietnamese government?

Oral Questions

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, in these circumstances I think we would have a greater chance of success if we could establish relations with whatever government takes power in South Viet Nam. One of the great problems we face, and I am sure this will be understood by members of the opposition, is that we have to conduct ourselves in such a way that if and when a change of government takes place we will be in a position to make successful representations.

Mr. McGrath: A final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. May I ask the Acting Prime Minister if during the interim the Canadian government has made any attempt whatsoever to have a Canadian immigration officer attached to either the United States legation in Saigon or the French legation in Saigon to process the papers of those South Vietnamese who may very well have permits to come to Canada?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, we made representations to the American government some days ago. We said that if any of these people to whom we have given letters or visas, and we provided the Americans with a list of them, did manage to get out of Viet Nam in any evacuation that the Americans may be able to enforce, we would be responsible for them financially, for their passage and so forth. It seemed to us that this was the most effective thing we could do on behalf of these people if they managed to get out.

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HOUSING

GOVERNMENT ACTION TO REDUCE MORTGAGE INTEREST
RATE AND INCREASE NUMBER OF STARTS

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Urban Affairs and concerns mortgage interest rates. Considering that mortgage payments for the average family are now in the neighbourhood of \$350 to \$400 per month, and considering that the legislation which the House passed about a month ago had the effect, through its indirect subsidy to the banks, of driving up the interest rates which is what the New Democratic Party said would happen, can the minister tell the House what steps he intends to take, other than moral suasion, to get the banks to bring down the mortgage interest rate?

Hon. Barney Danson (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I wish the hon. member would consult an economist and see the relationship of the subsidy to low income people who are buying housing under the existing scheme which is affected by the entire interest rate. This rate has not had any effect in increasing rates. There are many other factors at work which are being examined and discussed. We are doing everything possible to make sure that rates are kept as low as possible to enable those Canadians who need low cost housing to get it.

Mr. Broadbent: In short, nothing new. Considering that housing starts for 1975 are down by almost 50 per cent over last year and will run at an annual rate which is