

National Housing Act

referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps before the hon. member launches into his presentation I may say that when the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Macdonald) rose I thought he did so for the purpose of seconding the motion. I assume it should be recorded that the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Andras) seconds the motion.

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin my remarks by making a few general observations on the needs and requirements of our housing policy and its consequences for the development of our society—our cities.

In one way, the housing problem is easily defined. Quite simply, there are more families and non-family households in this country than there are dwellings, and too many dwellings are inadequate.

This means that some families have to double up in a single dwelling.

Mr. McCleave: Mr. Speaker, may I rise on a point of order. Would the minister be good enough to furnish me with a copy of his address? He has done so for others.

Mr. Andras: A copy is on its way to the hon. member.

To resume, Mr. Speaker, this means that some families have to double up in a single dwelling. It also means that many people are living in substandard housing, and face the resulting threat to health, comfort and self-esteem. There are many families that are overcrowded because the accommodation is too small for their needs.

One can see before one a piece of paper with a mass of numbers and columns headed by phrases such as "dwellings in need of major repair", "dwellings lacking running water and flush toilets", "dwellings without private bathing facilities", and other such headings. Those figures, columns and headings are the statistical measurements of the problem. But the significant measurement is in terms of deprivation, suffering, congestion, disparity and squalor. These are the things that define the housing problem to me. The statistics, such as they are, reveal to us that while there has been consistent improvement in all the indicators of housing shortage since the end of world war II, a very real backlog of need still exists. Poor people for the most part bear the brunt of the suffering that is inescapably entailed in this backlog.

[Mr. Trudeau.]

Most Canadians are well housed. A considerable number could be said to be indulgently housed. A few are lavishly housed. I am sure that all of those suffering the worst deprivations of the housing shortage would like to be better served, but I suspect also that it is difficult for them to make themselves heard. I have no doubt that the majority of Canadians whose housing is adequate but not indulgent would welcome an improvement, and many of them can and do say so. And some of those who are indulgently accommodated would like still better provision at lower cost and are in a position to express their discontent. And they do so.

The articulation of discontent stems from the whole spectrum of housing conditions and aspirations representing all income levels. Some of this articulation of discontent is valid, and some is not. It has reached a decibel level which is described by some as a housing crisis. The housing problem is something different. That is rooted in the actual deprivation of people at the lower level of the spectrum and can only be solved by the provision of decent accommodation for them.

Another significant dimension is that Canada today is primarily an urban society. Almost three quarters of Canadians live in the larger towns, cities and metropolitan areas. By 1980, it is estimated that more than 80 per cent of the population will be owning, renting, or hunting for shelter in our urban centres. Current trends indicate that almost one third of these people will live in our three largest urban centres of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

The quality of life in these rapidly growing communities is a matter of serious concern. We have heard much and can expect to hear more about pollution, overcrowding, traffic congestion, inadequate recreational facilities, alienation, deprivation and the inertia of some of our institutions. These issues cannot be neglected indefinitely nor can they be resolved by the methods of the past.

Nor can they be solved quickly or easily, Mr. Speaker. No single level of government, no one person, holds the key to their solution, or the formula for building better communities. The answers must be sought in joint planning and co-operative endeavours. We must seek ways for all levels of government, together with interested citizens, to achieve an urban environment which offers the physical, social and cultural dimensions of healthy and creative living.