

Discussion on Housing

[Translation]

Mr. Latulippe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to the minister. How is it that it is so easy for the government to find capital funds and pay a low interest rate, a mere carrying charge or no interest at all for periods of 50, 60 or 70 years to assist foreign countries, but that when it comes to helping Canadians to buy houses, to find suitable accommodation, it can do nothing better than charge prohibitive interest rates?

[English]

Mr. Nicholson: In this enlightened day and age prosperous countries such as Canada certainly have international as well as national obligations. I personally would like to see Canada devote even more to the less fortunate nations. The amount now spent on foreign aid is infinitesimal compared with the amount we are pouring into housing.

Mr. Knowles: It certainly is.

Mr. J. R. Keays (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, I was happy to hear the minister admit that some of the suggestions from this side of the house deserved study, because I am convinced that many of our proposals were advanced in an attempt to provide a solution to the problem. The problem is not one which relates only to a shortage of housing in Canada, and everyone agrees that it involves a crisis. The problem is of a monetary nature. We hope that the amendment moved by the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich will bring the problem to the attention of every member of the house. A solution must be found by those who have been entrusted with the administration of government.

The minister made some comments about the use of housing as an economic regulator and he paraphrased some of the statements in the Economic Council review. I am convinced that the day of using housing as an economic regulator is long past. If the minister will look closely at the recommendations of those who participated in the studies leading to the Economic Council report he will find that they also recommended a second look at the experience of the past regarding the use of housing as a stopgap, to be opened up when more jobs are required and closed when we have full employment. I therefore believe this to be the first step the minister should consider taking. He must keep in mind the fact that housing is an important problem that is with us now and will be with us in future years.

[Mr. Nicholson.]

● (5:50 p.m.)

The minister also spoke about the great changes that took place last year in respect of the percentage of dwellings constructed of one category or another. Surely he is not trying to tell us that this crisis was not foreseen. Surely the government was warned about the changes that would take place in the housing field. The government must have known this situation would exist if they referred to the reports of two years ago and last year and also to the forecast of the swift movement of the population to our urban areas. The government must have known this would create the problems which face us today.

This debate has been of benefit in the following respect. The minister told us that the government is applying priorities with respect to the moneys available for housing. He mentioned housing for families of low income and direct lending for individual homes. The minister has never before made these few acknowledgements. I believe the debate has at least brought out these facts. However, all we have heard from other hon. members opposite who have participated in the debate is statistics pointing up the good record of the government and the bad or not so good record of the previous government. I do not believe we face up to this problem when we invoke the statistics of the past, because those statistics are not comparable with the situation that exists today. I say also, Mr. Speaker, that statistics by themselves do not build shelters. They do not provide homes for those who need them, nor do they make homes available to those in the lower and middle income brackets.

We have heard statements from two ministers, one who increased the interest rate to 8½ per cent and the other the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp), who refuses to consider the removal of the 11 per cent sales tax on building materials. I am convinced that these are cold approaches to the problem. The only answer the government seems to have is that the problem will subsequently correct itself. In August the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) spoke about a conference on housing with the provinces. To date this conference has not been held. I admit that the minister endeavoured to give us a reason for its not being held. But I tell the minister that if we are to take the view that a provincial election every year in one or other of the provinces of Canada will make it impossible to hold such a conference, we will never have a conference of this type because one or other of the