

The Budget

thing we can certainly see these days—like the winter we are going through, which may end some time this spring?

But seriously, the housing situation has been discussed many times in this House, and with good reason. It is a good way to assess the poverty level of a city or any other community. In the last census, we get a very good picture of the rental housing situation in Quebec and Canada. In Toronto, 62 per cent of all units requiring major repairs were occupied by tenants. In Montreal, the figure is about the same, that is, 59 per cent; it is 58 per cent for Ottawa-Hull and 54 per cent for Vancouver.

In Montreal, families in rental housing live in appalling conditions. One household out of three spends more than 30 per cent of its income on accommodation, and one household out of six spends more than 50 per cent. Nearly 20,000 people are considered homeless. According to the Montreal Municipal Housing Bureau, 10,000 households or about 20,000 people are on the waiting list. Most of the requests for low-cost housing come from seniors, single-parent families and people with disabilities, that is to say the most vulnerable segment of our society.

• (1655)

Last Tuesday, merely two hours before the budget speech, when I inquired about the lack of social housing, the Minister of Public Works, who is responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, asked me to be patient, that I would have an opportunity to review the decisions of the Minister of Finance once he had delivered his budget. The fact of the matter is that there is nothing for social housing in that budget.

In Montreal, 63,280 households pay in excess of 50 per cent of their income in rent. That is about one tenant household in five, or 19.1 per cent. Montreal is the Canadian city with the highest number of tenant households paying over 50 per cent of their income in rent, with 19.1 per cent, as compared to 14.5 per cent in Ottawa and 16 per cent in Toronto.

One third of all tenant households forced to devote in excess of 50 per cent of their income to housing, or 194,225 households, live in Quebec, as compared to 583,705 in Canada. With a much larger population, Ontario has about the same number of households in the same predicament: 194,920 households, in a much larger population. There are 77,120 such households in British Columbia.

To complete this list of sad statistics showing the poverty level in Montreal, we must take a brief look at Montréal-Nord, a city represented by Mr. Nunez, the hon. member for Bourassa, a neighbouring riding. The level of poverty in Montréal-Nord is such that experts warn that it could turn into a social tinderbox. In Montréal-Nord, a very cosmopolitan city, 10,500 households, nearly 42 per cent of all tenant households, spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing, while 22 per cent

spend over 50 per cent. These figures reflect a completely absurd situation.

Again, it must be pointed out that, last October, the Minister of Finance, like the rest of the Liberal candidates, had promised to support co-ops and non-profit organizations involved in providing social housing.

At this point, I must quote statistics from the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada. In 1992, there were 17,400 housing units in Quebec versus 35,000 in Ontario; 17,400 versus 35,000. These figures show once again that Quebec does not get its fair share. One out of two is certainly not a prorated share. This is no doubt another good example of the fairness of the federal system.

Why is it then that the Minister of Finance wrote a coalition of organizations involved in social housing and told them that it was up to the federal administration to ensure that over one million Canadian households have decent and affordable housing? I hope that our colleagues will ask questions about the RRAP program, so that we can cover that aspect as well.

How can a nation which calls itself civilized and boasts that it is the best in the world, as our friends have told us repeatedly, see the desperate situation some of its citizens, people just like you and me, are in because they are unable to find work or have lost their jobs and have us believe that taking \$5.5 billion away from the unemployed over the next three years will help put Canada back to work? It is surrealistic. By failing to tackle the deficit directly by reducing duplication and overlap, of which we still do not fully appreciate the magnitude, failing to even impose minimum tax on large corporations and getting cold feet when it should cut federal operating expenditures, the government made the conscious decision to get the money it needed out of the pockets of the most vulnerable members of our society.

With the qualifying period for unemployment insurance benefits increased from 10 to 12 weeks, chances are that all those whose work is seasonal in nature, like farmers, fishermen, gardeners, waiters and waitresses, and summer camp workers, or do contract work, which is the only way for many young professionals to earn a living, will be greatly penalized. Again, the hardest hit by the measures introduced by the Minister of Finance will be the people who already have an employment problem.

• (1700)

Furthermore, beginning unemployment insurance reform before the vast consultation to identify the people's needs even begins will have a downright disastrous effect on the provinces' finances. These measures will put more people on welfare, at provincial expense; the provinces in turn will be forced to cut their programs as a result of the freeze on transfers to the provinces. Part of our deficit is being shifted to our neighbours,