

National Housing Act

Finally, this bill offers some significant improvements in the federal sewage treatment assistance program which is very familiar to all hon. members and which has helped to build virtually all of the treatment plants and trunk sewers installed in Canada in recent years. These provisions are essentially the same as those introduced in the last parliament but not passed because of the intervention of the general election, so I need not elaborate on them at any length or on the results of that election.

First, they extend the program, including the 25 per cent loan forgiveness features, beyond March, 1975, the date on which it would have expired by statute. As a way of getting more serviced land on the market, increasing the supply and holding down prices, the act is amended to include federal contributions toward the cost of storm trunk sewers when they are needed to open up new residential areas. Storm trunk sewers are not included in the present act.

This bill will also correct an unfair situation by increasing the amount of assistance that is available to municipalities whose sewage works impose a very high per capita burden on the local taxpayers, either because of the small population or because of the difficult nature of the terrain. The bill also provides grants to cover half the costs of preparing regional sewerage plans. Municipalities which borrow capital for qualified sewage treatment projects from some source other than CMHC would still be eligible for grants and favourable loans, again tapping the private sector and using the best leverage possible to get the greatest impact for the taxpayers' dollar. Other amendments included in this bill, as hon. members will see, increase the statutory limits on loans which may be made or insured by CMHC under certain sections of the act, insured home owner loans from \$19 billion to \$25 billion, direct CMHC loans from \$10 billion to \$12 billion and guaranteed home improvement loans from \$600 million to \$650 million.

I have attempted to describe for hon. members the principles which are embodied in this legislation. If I might summarize these principles very briefly, they are these. First, by providing additional, optional kinds of assistance, to widen the choices available to Canadians about the kind of housing they will occupy and how they will occupy it as owners, tenants or under some form of co-operative tenure. Second, by combining federal government grants with private capital, this bill seeks to infuse a substantial amount of new financing into the production of housing of a kind and at a cost that suits the needs of Canadian families. Finally, while responding to people's prime need for good shelter in a secure environment, this bill, by increasing the effective demand for housing, will have a stimulating and regenerative effect throughout the whole economy.

For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I feel the country is urgently in need of this legislation and I commend it to the attention of all hon. members. While I would like to stress the word "urgent", this bill must have the serious consideration of this House and the committee. However, I hope all members will give it high priority, as it is essential to remove any uncertainty in the minds of those who need housing and the housing industry so that industry can get moving in what will be a difficult year because of

[Mr. Danson.]

over-all economic circumstances. While I welcome a most thorough investigation, I would also welcome expeditious passage of this legislation through its further stages.

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a few remarks on Bill C-46 to which the minister has been devoting considerable attention, both inside the House and outside, for some considerable time. On a number of occasions he has spoken glowingly and at length about the amendments to the National Housing Act. In fact, he has been speaking about them almost daily since last fall with ever expanding verbosity and euphoric enthusiasm. I might say to the minister that if verbal virtuosity were only matched by performance, we would have houses sprouting up like mushrooms. But words do not create houses; enthusiasm is no substitute for effectiveness when it comes to coping with a crisis—and that is what we are discussing here today, Mr. Speaker.

● (1520)

A few years ago it was recognized that there was a housing problem in Canada—government inaction permitted it to develop into an emergency situation, but what confronts us now is no longer a problem or an emergency situation; it is a crisis of major proportions. Anyone who doubts or discounts or dismisses this is propagating a dangerous delusion which will undermine the economic stability of the country. Although we will want to examine the bill in detail in committee and suggest some changes, we in this party have no quarrel with the amendments put forward this afternoon. Nevertheless, they do not tackle the root cause and what concerns me here is that the minister is putting these amendments forward as the solution to the housing crisis.

Whether deliberately or not, the minister has left the impression with the people of this country that all these restrictive programs apply to everyone else but the person himself. He has left the impression that large numbers of individuals are benefiting from these programs except for the unfortunate few who have been excluded. In reality, these unfortunate few are the great majority of Canadians whose housing needs are critical but who are not eligible for assistance under any of these programs. Given the minister's proclivity for touting these programs, why, for instance, has he not proudly recited the numbers who have benefited from the \$500 grant for first-time purchases of new housing? The reason, I suggest, is that because of the limitations, limitations which exclude existing housing, it has not been successful. Again and again, expectations have been created which the legislation has failed to satisfy. This is what I mean by misleading impressions.

In principle, the amendments are acceptable—loans and grants for sewerage systems, assistance for rental construction, federal land-lease programs for non-profit and co-operative housing, extended assistance for home ownership; but the measures proposed by the government are typical of so much previous legislation introduced by Liberal governments. The legislation lacks any over-all view, any comprehensive approach or even any awareness of the magnitude of the national housing crisis.

Our party has long advocated greater participation in urban affairs. Urban affairs is the linchpin, the focal point