

Suggested Lack of Urban Policy

• (9:50 p.m.)

Mr. John L. Skoberg (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, in winding up this debate tonight I have no hesitation in stating my support for the motion put forward by this party that the House condemns the government for its failure to establish an urban policy for Canada. As the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) suggested and as the minister agreed, this discussion will be the subject of debate probably this fall. I am wondering whether those people in Canada who have been unable to raise sufficient money to take part in the government's housing program are prepared to wait until fall to obtain suitable housing accommodation.

The piecemeal approach to which members have referred today is not one that Canada as a whole can bear for long. The minister has stated that he has been seized with the importance of this question for some time, and I am amazed that this being the case the government has not provided the appropriate programs by now. The minister suggested we will have to wait until fall before we know what they are all about.

The minister stated that many studies of the problem have been carried out for many years, and I am sure that this is so. I am also certain that those studies are not enough to meet the present demand for housing. The minister referred to the number of housing starts in Canada, but I am sure he will agree that only 7 per cent of the number he quoted are houses for people on low incomes. This is the area we are concerned about when we talk of a national housing policy to meet the needs of all citizens in Canada, not just the affluent few.

The press release which our party put out in connection with this debate spells out that we are not in favour of a piecemeal approach to this problem. It is not the intention of any member of this party to suggest a cutback in any program, but rather that we co-ordinate our efforts to achieve a national policy. The minister himself gave support to that principle in his speech tonight when he suggested to the House that he has always believed there should be a national policy.

A perusal of the number of studies made in Canada even of very small urban centres shows that such sociological studies are of the utmost importance—I suggest the most important of all studies of the housing question. Unfortunately, some economists fail to look at those areas of our social

environment which reflect the people who are in need. I suggest to the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we must get our professors, teachers and students of sociology to examine the needs of urban centres and to ascertain whether or not as a result of the piecemeal approach of the government our whole society is crumbling.

Many interested groups in society have produced films illustrating this piecemeal approach of the government. For example, in cases of urban renewal the people who are displaced are often not taken into the confidence of the government or of those responsible for making studies relating to urban renewal. There have been instances where the federal, provincial and municipal governments have combined together to displace people from neighbourhoods in which they have lived all their lives, regardless whether these people wished to be displaced or whether they could afford to be displaced from their existing accommodation. This has happened all across the country and it is something of which we as Canadians should not be proud.

Many things have been said about the amount of assistance given by the federal government to municipal and provincial governments. Members from all parts of Canada realize that even the small urban centres are in a bind today in the matter of cash inflow and cash input. When we realize the tremendous load shouldered by municipalities in the matter of education costs alone, there is little doubt that they cannot afford urban renewal or housing projects that will provide shelter for people in need. As the minister stated, the federal government makes grants in lieu of taxes in many areas, and to some extent this is correct. At the same time, no municipal government is in a position to put its resources behind projects of urban renewal in order to provide the type of environment in which our children should grow up. People on fixed incomes have no chance of owning a house in many centres of urban renewal across Canada if their present accommodation is taken from them. This fact makes me wonder whether we are an affluent society as well as a just society in any meaning of that term.

I am sure the government realizes that a discussion of housing needs is not premature. There is a need for housing today. Before the House rises I ask the minister to tell the House what are his plans, so that the people of this nation can be proud to call themselves Canadians and so they will know the govern-