

*Housing*

again hear from the Prime Minister that the constitution is blocking housing programs. That is utter nonsense. If there are any factors in reference to housing that fall within the jurisdiction of the provinces they can be met through negotiation. Because it is a national crisis the responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of the federal government.

**Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood):** Mr. Speaker, the crucial issue in this debate is the whole future scope of federal government in Canada. The question is, are we going to treat the Canadian constitution as a means of preventing federal action in the field of vital national social problems affecting all Canadians?

Housing is vitally important, but it is only one of the national problems of concern in this debate. During the election the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) sought widespread support for himself and his party by appearing to be a strong federalist. He spoke of a strong Canada, and many people thought he means a Canada whose federal government would in fact use strong initiatives to deal with the pressing problems of the Canadian people.

The Prime Minister's election campaign was carefully managed, through vagueness and the exploitation of a certain charisma, to conceal the true views and intentions of the Prime Minister. A certain verbal bellicosity vis-a-vis the Prime Minister of Quebec was used to create an illusion that the Prime Minister was a champion of a strong federal government. It is this false view of the Prime Minister's basic stand that has been shot down in flames by his closest colleague, the Minister of Transport.

The Minister of Transport has made it abundantly clear in his letters and interviews that the Prime Minister's interpretation of the present constitution is that the federal government should stay out of using federal powers to deal with issues such as housing, pollution, inflation and urban development. I am not making this up. These are the words of the Minister of Transport, formerly the deputy prime minister. It really is a matter of interpretation.

● (4:50 p.m.)

The Prime Minister adopts a view that is quite a responsible view and held currently by a number of people, particularly people within his own province. This view is that the use

of its spending power by the federal government to deal with national needs is an intrusion upon provincial rights. I say to the Prime Minister that it is not as clear as all that. There is another constitutional view, and I think a better one, and that is that the federal government under its powers of taxation and spending has the power to be a strong and purposeful government. I think it has the legal right to use those powers to deal with those problems, and I think it should use those powers in co-operation with the provincial and local governments, but with a firm federal initiative in the field.

The Prime Minister, to do him justice, has made it clear, if one studies his writings, his statements and what he said to the students in London at the time of the Commonwealth conference and repeated I think in Calgary, that he accepts an interpretation of the constitution which gives to the provinces the major, if not the sole, power in such fields as housing. Other have mentioned that we take issue with this view, as I think does the Minister of Transport. The Prime Minister's view is that of a cautious and laissez-faire government which cannot act firmly in the interests of Canadians. As I said before, there is a view held by people in some parts of Canada that the federal government should not deal even with the vital social need of people to have shelter. If such a view should be held in one province, perhaps some constitutional or governmental arrangement could be made to give that part of Canada where the view is held the right to opt out of activity in this field at the federal level.

I suggest, however, it is totally unacceptable that the Prime Minister should impose on us his own view, although it is shared by some others, of the constitution that effective action in those parts of the country which believe as we do should be vetoed and prevented by this narrow view of the constitutional position.

I should like to turn directly to the question of housing. I could not but help notice that the Prime Minister placed a relatively low priority on the matter of housing. I say that we in this party, especially those of us who happen to come from urban centres, place a very high priority on the question of housing. Our view is not based on comforting statistics about housing, and rates of starts. Our view is based upon a daily acquaintance with the facts.