

Statements by Ministers

of Ontario, I know the Liberal Government will use its housing money in a wise fashion but I also know that for the last 43 years, there was a Conservative Government in Ontario that did not believe in social housing and wanted to direct all subsidies toward developers. With the introduction of this document which is clearly focused on rent subsidies and specific income unit supplements, the Minister is saying to the developers that they will have a heyday because the Government will give them hundreds of dollars per unit in rent supplements for those people who cannot afford to pay.

There are groups and organizations which have developed a policy for national housing. They have created projects with perhaps only 25 per cent low-income residents. I can think of First Place and St. John's Place in my own riding, the kind of housing organizations which deliberately decided to have a mix of those people who were needy, those who were less needy and those who could afford to pay market rents. Those projects will no longer be viable as a result of this program because the funding from the Ministry will be directed only toward those occupants who are in the low-income category. Quite clearly, that spells the death of social housing and the development of a national housing stock, something which has been a hallmark for Canada.

Over the last six months, the Minister has denied that he was meeting with the provincial Governments in an attempt to pass off responsibility. We have seen that that is exactly what he intended to do as he indicates right here in this document. We know that British Columbia is about to sign an agreement. Further, we know that there are other provinces across the country that are looking at signing agreements in the very near future, agreements which will spell the end of a national housing policy.

The Minister has made a differentiation between the funding available for rural and urban Canadians and for that I applaud him. However, I think the Minister should further recognize that there are provinces in this country that cannot, on their own, afford to develop the kind of housing policy that was made available because successive Liberal Governments believed that the national Government had a responsibility to balance inequities from coast to coast. Does the Minister really believe that the Province of Newfoundland has the financial resources to carry on the kind of housing program that would have occurred under federal jurisdiction? That is simply not the case, and I say that this document is a sell-out of 25 years of housing policy which has created not great housing, not even good housing but better housing for thousands of Canadians who could not afford housing and who will not be able to afford it now because the money will be going to the developers and to those people who least need the help.

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, over the past year and a bit, we have been able to observe that the Hon. Minister has indeed worked very hard on the housing end of his portfolio. I do credit him with taking his responsibility very seriously. There are some good things in this report and I will note some of them later. However, I am disappointed in the report as a whole.

The Minister gives no estimate of cost except by indicating in one line that there will be no more money provided than there was in this past Budget, the low point for housing efforts on the part of the federal Government for many, many years. He gives no indication of the number of units that will be provided. He talks about the million people for whom the private market does not provide but does not at all ensure that his program is intended to provide for all of them. In fact, his presentation appears to be an attempt to defend the private market with its great boondoggles over the past 30 or so years in which not only the federal Government but the Ontario Conservative Government participated heavily. Things like the MURBs, the assisted rental projects and the limited dividend projects were all programs for impoverished developers like Trizec, Cadillac Fairview and Meridian.

The tenants know where the money went. The billions of dollars went for housing subsidies and it did not go to the co-operative movement, the non-profit housing or low-income tenants. At a time like this when it is reported that the poor as a proportion of the Canadian population have increased to one-sixth of our population, there is to be no increase in the money supplied for housing, no assurance that there will be more social housing provided and no program for indicating which portion of what the Minister calls the core poor will be helped. He will use the poor, though, as an excuse for cutting back on certain aspects of the social housing program which have been extremely valuable to the life of cities like Toronto which I know and other cities which I have visited.

● (1600)

He pats himself on the back for his consultative approach. Although it was an energetic approach involving a good deal of hard work, it was not consultative. It was elitist; it was secretive. It may have been clever market research reaching out to find out which individuals or which leaders of which groups might agree with the things that he chose to do, but he carefully prevented the groups from being able to consult effectively with them. He would say: "Now, I might do this for you but don't tell anybody about it".

When my office tried to get some of the studies, some of the briefs which were presented, his office presented so-called legal objections. Somehow or another they were not able to send us those briefs. He has bragged about the confirming study that was done by his colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Nielsen). My office has been trying since the summer to obtain a copy of that study from the Deputy Prime Minister's office and has been told that the study was not yet complete. Perhaps it was completed last night.

The program consists of doling out small amounts of help to some of the most obvious needy groups as an excuse for turning the very major part of responsibility for housing back to the private market, which has already failed in the matter. It is misleading to say that all the money spent in the past many years did not increase the housing stock and reduce the need very much when he knows full well that the reason was