

Government Orders

units. As well, the RRAP, which provided assistance to repair social housing units, was abolished. Quebec thus sustained a major shortfall.

This Liberal government made promises during the last election campaign. In October 1993, several Liberal candidates, including the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, attended a meeting with officials from the Confédération des coopératives d'habitation de la grande région de Montréal, and made commitments regarding social housing. Among other measures, they were supposed to unfreeze the CMHC budget, so as to make it possible to build 5,800 new co-op housing units in Canada. They were also supposed to re-examine the percentage of investment required of the municipalities. Hooray for this wonderful platform. But after October 25, 1993, as if by magic, the Liberal government forgot its commitments.

Let us look at what the Liberals have done since they came to power. They have dashed all hopes of new housing units being built. They have required CMHC to turn back to the government close to \$270 million saved in current operating expenses which could have been ploughed back into the community.

In 1995, this government pressured the provinces to raise rents in social housing. Six provinces gave in, while Quebec made it clear that it would not. The present government is quite simply continuing along the same political path as the Conservatives before it.

Yet, the last time they campaigned, the Liberals condemned the brutal cuts in subsidized housing. Even the Minister of Finance, the same gentleman who predicted that one million jobs would disappear if Quebec voted yes in the referendum, himself pledged to ensure secure, guaranteed funding for social housing. Nothing has come of this. In Quebec, the losses over the past five years are estimated at very close to a billion dollars.

The Bloc Québécois cannot tolerate such a situation. Social housing is more than a roof over people's heads. It is a vital element of economic and social policy. A good housing program must enable people to acquire a feeling of social identity and must provide them with the opportunity to control one of the factors influencing their lives.

For example, a co-operative housing project allows its members to live within a co-operative framework. Often various recreational activities are organized. Furthermore, members have to get involved in running their co-operative. Without their social housing, many of them would live in isolation. By dropping social housing, the government aggravates housing conditions. That, in turn, substantially increases other problems such as poverty and hunger. Indeed, poverty, hunger and housing are closely linked.

• (1835)

Consider the situation in my riding. In Chicoutimi, more than 9,000 households or 44 per cent are tenants. Of that number, 3,000 have to spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. This is unacceptable. This percentage is critical. Thirty-five per cent of tenants face this kind of situation. And more than 16 per cent spend half their income on housing.

This is a situation that has dramatic consequences and must be corrected. To pay the rent, an increasing number of tenants are forced to cut back on essentials like food. In many households, even that is not enough. The statistics of the Régie du logement show that the number of tenants behind in their rent is increasing, not because they are more reluctant to pay but because the proportion of their income they must spend on rent is too high.

In its health and welfare policy, the Quebec government stated in 1992: "The cost of housing is a major item in a family's budget. If the cost of housing constantly causes major cuts in the budget for food, clothing and recreation, the quality of physical and mental health will be affected".

In 1993, the UN committee on economic, social and cultural rights published a report on poverty in Canada. The report paints a damning picture of the housing situation. That committee was surprised to learn that social housing expenditures did not exceed 1.3 per cent of public spending.

In this era marked by a lack of permanent jobs and basic social rights, social housing is an important problem and will become increasingly so. The very health of those living in inadequate housing is at stake. We know who these people usually are: women who are the main breadwinners in their families, people who live alone, single parent families.

To tackle the problem, the government must substantially increase investments in housing, which would result in significant savings in health and social services. We must also consider the considerable impact on employment, which would be very beneficial at this time.

The government should develop an ambitious housing policy focused on building new social housing units by the year 2000, with a view to offering quality, environmentally sound housing, with adequate services and facilities for handicapped and mobility impaired people, among others.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to an order made earlier today by unanimous consent, the question is deemed to have been put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until tomorrow at 5.15 p.m.