

Discussion on Housing

construction of low-cost housing for our people, our poor in Montreal who need them so badly.

In fact, I have been told that, in one portion alone of the site of the world fair, we could house 30,000 families. Let us think about it, Mr. Speaker, 30,000 families.

In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, if we carried out that project, it would be one of the most outstanding gestures of human brotherhood on the part of the Canadian people towards the underprivileged classes of our society, and I urge the minister—this is my suggestion to him—when discussions about the possible use of the world fair site take place, to make that suggestion to the Montreal municipal authorities and those of the Quebec government. In so doing, I am convinced that we would make a worthwhile contribution to a group of our people who need it very badly. Of course, the minister said yesterday that the present government found it difficult to borrow. The same applies to provincial governments.

The Quebec minister of finance told us recently that the borrowing index of the province and that personal and corporate income taxes evidenced that other sources of revenue had to be found. Since Quebec, as well as the other Canadian provinces, desperately need money to set up the various building programs for low-rent housing projects, it is high time, as I said earlier, that the minister convened a federal-provincial conference in order to discuss and solve that problem without delay.

Mr. Speaker, this evening we will be asked to vote on an amendment. All the members are acquainted with the amendment of our party because, to my mind, it is quite clear. We were told yesterday, and it was confirmed this afternoon, that the New Democratic Party would support the amendment. We thank them for their support. We hope that the other parties in the house as well as a few Liberal members—although I doubt it—will also support our amendment. We do not want to twist the knife, nor do we want to challenge the minister. He is an extremely likable fellow, but the government, and cabinet have swamped him with problems in the last two years.

He had some last year with the longshoremen's strike in Montreal; this year, we have to face another crucial matter, housing. Now, through this amendment, we simply want the government to think about it. We are asking the government not to wait until a situation

deteriorates before it acts. We are asking the government whether it plans to govern. To govern is to foresee. We are asking the government to foresee difficult situations in the future. Then, even if our amendment is defeated tonight, it will have awakened Canadians to an increasingly important problem and will be of great help to the government.

• (4:50 p.m.)

[*English*]

Hon. J. R. Nicholson (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, when the estimates of Central Housing and Mortgage Corporation were before the committee of supply last week I stated that I would welcome suggestions and constructive criticisms from members of the house. I think my words were to the effect that if one is not prepared to take criticism, even criticism that may not always be constructive, one should not be in politics. After only five years in this environment I think I can state that with all sincerity. However, I did and do welcome suggestions and I do and have welcomed criticism of the proposals that we have put forward. I will try to deal with the suggestions and the criticism later in my remarks. However, I do intend to pursue the contributions that individual members of the house have made in the course of this debate and I will deal with their remarks in the order in which they have been made.

The hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Chatterton), who proposed the amendment on which we will be voting in a matter of a few hours, first referred to the housing requirements in the part of Canada which he knows best. None of us would be human if, believing that some special problems exist that affect our particular riding or the part of the country in which we live and in which we have a special interest, we did not concern ourselves with such problems. However, I wish to say that I do have some detailed knowledge of the housing problems of the city of Victoria and environs and I do know that the greatest need in that particular part of British Columbia is for housing for elderly citizens, for public housing and—yes, a remarkable trend during recent years—a growing need for apartment houses.

That special need, the need for apartment houses, leads me to some of the references which the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich made to the report of the Economic Council of Canada. A number of references have been made to that report, including the fact that I was critical of it. If my remarks