

Urgency of Housing Debate

Mr. MacEachen: How true, Mr. Speaker; it is the same old gang.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I wonder whether hon. members want to pursue the debate. I might say that I have reached an opinion as a result of the arguments advanced by both sides of the house. However, I would not want to curtail this interesting discussion. I perceive the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre wishes to contribute to the debate and I will recognize him.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Health and Welfare began his remarks by saying that everyone who had spoken to this question was completely out of order. I suggest that practically all the members on this side of the house who have spoken to the question have addressed themselves to the urgency of debate. I would draw attention particularly to the fact that the hon. member for Mégantic read the portion of the citation that deals with this aspect of the problem. I think it is important and that the house should hear it again. Citation 100 (3) reads as follows:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself—

We all accept that.

—but it means "urgency of debate", when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the house do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

That is the basis on which this request has been made by the official opposition, and it is the basis on which we intended to make the same request today. I point out to Your Honour that on some occasions when an attempt is made to adjourn the house under standing order 26 a spokesman for the government gets into the debate on the procedural question and indicates a definite time when the subject before us may be discussed. But today the government house leader has taken part in the debate and all he has given us is the assurance that it will be possible to discuss this matter some time soon. In light of the urgency of the situation, and in light of the need for discussion to take place so that the public interest will not suffer, we suggest it is not good enough to say that there will be a discussion of this matter soon.

In the course of a conversation I had with the government house leader this morning he was good enough to indicate to me the business for today and tomorrow and, for that

[Mr. Pearson.]

matter, for the balance of this week. I suspect he has given that same information to the other house leaders. There is nothing in the list given to me that opens up the possibility of discussing the housing crisis this week.

I agree with all those who have spoken about the urgency of debate that the crisis is so serious that it is not proper for parliament to put it off week after week to that eventual day—some time soon. The crisis is here now. What is needed, and needed precisely within the terms of citation 100 (3), is debate now so that the public interest will not suffer.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare says that the minister responsible for housing the Minister of Labour, is not present. The Prime Minister has been able to make pronouncements on the question of housing. Surely this is a matter of government concern, despite the hon. member for Verdun who thinks it is a provincial matter. This matter is a federal responsibility. The whole country has been aware for the past two months of the growing nature of this crisis. Surely any prophet could have indicated that this question was going to be raised today. I submit that it is not a satisfactory excuse for the government to say that one particular minister is not here today to deal with the matter.

I am not discussing the urgency of the matter; we are all aware of that. I am saying that within the rules of the house there is urgency of debate, and that that debate ought to be allowed today.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister has already taken part in this debate. Is he rising on a question of privilege?

Mr. MacEachen: I rose on a point of order and so stated, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to comment on the fact that the hon. member—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I suggest to the minister that it would not be conducive to reaching an early decision in this matter if we were to continue the argument on whether or not the point of view expressed by the minister is correct. If it will make the minister feel a bit better, I might tell him that generally speaking I tend to agree with the position he has taken.