

Suggested Lack of Urban Policy

I am glad to say the government is committed to making sure that particularly favourable consideration is given to the low-income sector, because I honestly believe that if a serious crisis exists in this country it is in the low-income sector. We are doing our best to speed up the provision of this kind of housing. We could probably build more units in this country with the funds available now if we are prepared to accept the standards which find acceptance in some of the countries toward which we look as being enlightened in terms of housing policy.

I believe the Swedish approach could teach us many things, particularly in the areas of urban planning, land use, rapid transit and the like. But with great respect for the government and people of Sweden, I say quite frankly—and those who disagree with me should go there—that I doubt very much whether Canadians would accept in terms of size and amenities the housing units which the Swedish people have been prepared to accept even in the great city of Stockholm. I do not think we should be too quick to judge.

I will be happy, as soon as our anti-inflation objectives have been reached, to do whatever can be done to increase the effort which is being made as far as housing starts are concerned. I do not doubt, when that point has been reached, that housing will be among the first concerns of the government and that it will receive even greater attention than it is getting now.

In a way, this debate has been somewhat premature but as far as I am concerned it has served a useful purpose. We are not so omniscient on this side that we can afford to forego any opportunity to profit from honest advice or helpful suggestions emanating from the opposition. There have in fact been some very interesting comments; in many cases I was in full agreement with them. I noted one observation in the opening speech made by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent). He said the Prime Minister should take more interest in these matters.

I can assure him that the Prime Minister is taking a tremendous amount of interest in them and that the kind of interest he is taking would totally conform to the line set out by the hon. member as indicated in the press release, that is to say, a new approach is needed, not a fragmented, half-baked start on these things. The Prime Minister is insisting that the recommendations be in depth.

[Mr. Andras.]

As to the proposed department of urban affairs, I agree that this is a possible option but I would be happier if we were to address ourselves first of all to the formulation of objectives. The implementation would then be a logical consequence of that process. To my mind this is preferable to putting bureaucracy in motion and then finding objectives to justify its existence. In passing, I note there was a suggestion that the federal government should pay the municipalities the equivalent of municipal taxes. In order that the record may be clear, let me say that the federal government does pay to the municipalities grants in lieu of taxes. Municipalities are compensated for the services which they provide, and where grants are lower than full taxes, it is because the federal government is providing services itself which ordinarily would be furnished by the municipalities. If any hon. members are aware of any deviations, I would appreciate it if they would inform me.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must interrupt the minister because his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

Mr. Speaker: Does the House agree that the minister may continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Andras: I appreciate the courtesy of hon. members, Mr. Speaker. I have listened with much interest and advantage to the discussion which has gone forward here today. We shall be discussing this subject again in the House in the fall, and I have no doubt that the government will be telling hon. members about the course of action it proposes to follow.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, could I ask the minister a question? It has to do with the last statement he made, that we would be dealing with this matter some time in the fall. I hoped we would have some answers before that time to several of the questions which have been raised. Can the minister elaborate on what he meant when he said he would be dealing with this matter in the fall? I hope some direction or leadership will be forthcoming from the minister in this regard.

Mr. Andras: I feel that rather than asking me to elaborate or give an explanation, the hon. gentleman is simply asking me to repeat what I have said. I would ask him to let it stand on the record as is. It will be there in *Hansard* tomorrow for his perusal.