

Housing

● (1710)

An hon. Member: Eighteen months! It has taken more like 18 years.

Mr. Anderson: Hon. members opposite will have their turn. Just listen, I say, and perhaps they will learn something. Yes, there have been consultations with native peoples for 18 months. I suggest to the hon. member that it is better to take 18 months going through the consultative process with the National Indian Brotherhood than to sit in an ivory tower for six months discussing the problem with other officials of the department. I wish the opposition would say which way it prefers to do it. Do they want the Indian Affairs Department to do it on their own, quickly, or are they in favour of consultation with the National Indian Brotherhood and other groups? I think the opposition—assuming we could get a straight answer from them—would agree that consultation should be the order of the day. In years gone by we should have placed greater emphasis on consultation with the native people. Thank God that such consultation is not a matter of priority; it is the order of the day. Let us not say that negotiation has not continued for some time—because it has, and for good reason. We wanted the full input of the native people since we are talking about their houses, not the houses of members of parliament.

May I comment about some of the discussions involving Mr. Manuel, the National Indian Brotherhood and the Department of Indian Affairs to do with low income families and how the government should deal with their housing. The consensus which has emerged from these discussions is that any housing program proposed by the Department of Indian Affairs alone or in conjunction with Central Mortgage and Housing must first meet the needs of the low income family. The problems of the low income family must be solved first; only then should we embark on other programs.

The question of subsidies was raised by the Indian Brotherhood. I think we all agree that \$10,000 is too little in this day and age. As a result of these discussions, I do not doubt that we shall soon hear the announcement that this amount of subsidy will be increased.

Mr. Brisco: What took you so long? It has taken over five years.

Mr. Anderson: The hon. member for Kootenay West has had his opportunity. Perhaps he will allow me to speak. I did not interrupt him. I am sure the hon. member wants to be fair.

Mr. Brisco: But I had something of value to contribute.

Mr. Anderson: The third point discussed was the question of loans. Again, the matter has not been finalized. It was suggested in the discussions that a percentage figure rather than an exact amount should be arrived at with respect to a building program. In other words, one should not say, "We will provide \$25,000," or whatever the figure may be. The native peoples should provide, with their own work, a certain percentage of the value of housing being erected. As Mr. Manuel said, native

[Mr. Anderson.]

people should provide "sweat equity" in any housing program. In other words, native peoples ought to accumulate equity by working on the houses. If they could work on their own housing programs, they would be employed. Such participation would be fruitful to native peoples, since by working on the projects they would acquire useful skills, something which the Department of Indian Affairs ought to encourage.

As the National Indian Brotherhood said in its discussions with Department of Indian Affairs officials, it is not reasonable to expect off-reserve people to come on to the reserve and build houses and tolerate the existence of unemployment on the reserve. The obvious solution is to make sure that the native peoples participate in these housing programs and do not merely sit on the sidelines watching houses being built.

The concept of a joint housing group was also mooted in the discussions. Although the discussions have not been completed, I understand that a national Indian housing council has been set up, and I also understand that a regional group has been set up in Ontario. Such groups are vehicles for consultation. Officials of various government departments sit down with native peoples and discuss what questions are of high priority, what is not of high priority, what should be done and in which direction the program ought to proceed. At present, certain pilot projects are under way. In this connection may I say that certain band councils have taken action on their own initiative and, having established their own priorities, set up their own housing programs.

It is not the intention of the National Indian Brotherhood or the Department of Indian Affairs to establish inflexible programs. In other words, the basic decision as to where housing money should be spent will be taken at the band council level. I trust hon. members opposite agree that such decisions should be made at the band council level and not in regional districts or in Ottawa. What I have just said applies not only to housing but should apply to many other circumstances involving our native peoples. Our band councils must make these important decisions.

I trust that as time passes some bands in our prairie provinces will adopt this concept in a meaningful way. It is fair to say that many bands on the west coast of British Columbia have advanced furthest with this process of democracy at the reserve level. In my area the bands are basically self-governing groups. As hon. members know, the B.C. Council of Indian Chiefs has been disbanded and decisions are made strictly at the band council level. I applaud this. It is good that they are running their own affairs with as little interference as possible from the Department of Indian Affairs.

I have seen some figures relating to houses built last year and have learned that in 1975, and up to the period ending March 31, 1976, 1,819 new houses were built on reserve lands and 2,163 houses came under the major renovation sections. Approximately \$30 million was spent on the process. Perhaps hon. members opposite think that \$30 million is not enough.

Mr. Neil: It almost covers the minister's travelling expenses.