

*Housing*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner):** Order, please. I am advised that the minister is just about to relate his remarks to the question under discussion.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Ouellet:** Mr. Speaker, I am surprised at the reaction of opposition members when I say that in discharging my responsibilities as minister I do not intend to punish Quebecers. I wonder if their reaction means that they would like to punish them, but certainly I do not intend to do that as a minister of the federal government.

When he tied in my responsibilities as minister with that motion which concerns the improvement of government policies on urban, rural and native housing, I think the hon. member got carried away in his motion. Of course the opposition should criticize. Our programs are not as good as they would like them to be but they cannot say that the government has no urban and rural housing programs for natives or other Canadians. On the contrary, we do have very good programs and we are trying to improve them.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to say as a minister of the Canadian government—and as other ministers of the Canadian government who, like myself, grant important amounts of money in all the provinces—that we do not intend to starve Quebecers out, because I do not doubt that it would be the quickest and surest way to push them toward separation. When an individual would have nothing to lose, that day he could embark upon a dangerous venture. My responsibility, Mr. Speaker, will be to see that no Canadian wherever he may live in this country might one day conclude that he would have nothing to lose by leaving Canada.

[*English*]

**Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories):** Mr. Speaker,—

**Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich):** Give him the leg-hold trap treatment, Wally.

**Mr. Firth:** I suppose large numbers of people in Quebec have stopped shivering in their boots. They now have the assurance of the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) that they will not be punished.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** It was so kind of him to give that assurance.

**Mr. Firth:** Mr. Speaker, the motion we are debating reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government's policies with respect to urban and rural native housing are totally inadequate.

I agree with the hon. member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. Holmes) and am sorry to say that our housing is totally inadequate. I am very disappointed—I am sure I speak for many native people in Canada when I say this—in the government's housing program. It just is not working. On October 25 I mentioned in the throne speech debate in this House that rural and native housing must become a high priority item on the list of the government's policies, especially in northern Canada. Nowhere have housing conditions become more des-

[Mr. McGrath.]

perate than in northern Canada. As I have said in this House previously when discussing housing, the Northwest Territories, from the point of view of housing, must be described as a disaster area.

In Canada, as in other countries, housing should be looked on as a basic human right. Since the beginning of human existence on earth man has sought shelter for himself and his family; he has sought protection from the elements. Today, considering the vast resources and many technological skills we possess as Canadians, it is a national disgrace that so many Canadian families are forced to live in totally inadequate housing.

On March 8, 1974, the minister then responsible for housing, now the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford), announced the establishment of the rural and native housing program. I thought it was a good idea. The aim of the program was to build 50,000 new housing units by the end of 1978. Construction did not start until 1975. By the end of that year just over 2,700 units had been built, bought or rehabilitated. I am not certain if these units were located in southern rural areas, on reserves, or in northern Canada. I do not think anybody knows. At present it is highly unlikely that the program will come even close to achieving its goal of 50,000 new housing units built in this country by the end of 1978.

This failure in housing starts can lead to increasingly hard and difficult times and frustrations for native and other peoples living in rural areas, especially in my constituency, the Northwest Territories. To understand the desperate situation of the native people one should know some background; in other words, why the program was established in the first place. The rural and native housing program was developed originally by the provincial and territorial Metis and non-status Indian associations.

Native leaders recognize that housing is a good vehicle for breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty which has held so many communities captive for many generations. This cycle is familiar to many native families. We know that good housing can provide tremendous benefits for people, especially poor people. I am thinking of the improvement in family life associated with good housing. That in itself is a strong argument in favour of good housing. Adequate housing helps to keep families together besides improving the over-all health of families. Plain common sense suggests that a family will be healthier if its basic human need for adequate housing and heating is met, and that is another argument in favour of good housing. Much of the illness and mental stress among the native peoples of Canada can be attributed to inadequate, often miserable housing. Countless sociological studies have shown that when a family is well housed it is better able to do good work in society. Well-housed people can hold on to a job more easily and are more willing to work harder at their jobs.

Because so many native people lack this basic necessity, they feel insecure. There is not the same motive to look for work. Often they find it difficult to keep a job, because such people have no place in which to eat and rest before they go back to work. The home life of many native people is not good because