

National Housing Act

annually was diminishing. In 1968 the banks advanced \$23.9 million compared with the 1967 figure of \$35.2 million. At this rate it would be roughly three years before there was any need to raise the ceiling. I wonder whether the minister has noticed that this looks very like window-dressing, when you raise the ceiling long before you have reached the ceiling.

But even these figures are misleading. The federal government commitment on home improvement loans is limited to 5 per cent of the total loans by each of the banks. In other words, the maximum involvement of the federal government in the 13 years since 1955 was \$21 million, or \$1.6 million a year. This was the government commitment, but of course the actual commitment was not called upon.

According to C.M.H.C. figures the total 13 years' claims and legal expenses paid by the federal government under the home improvement loans scheme amounted to \$2.9 million, of which \$600,000 or so was recovered. The total expenditure, therefore, in 13 years for the whole of Canada on home improvement loans by the federal government amounted to \$2.3 million, or \$177,000 a year, so that the big talk of raising the ceiling from \$550 million to \$600 million means very little when you look at the real government contribution of only \$170,000 a year across Canada. I say that this is not a serious contribution to the solution of the problem.

The home improvement loans scheme has failed to achieve any worth-while purpose. Who got the benefit of these loans which were partially subsidized or at least supported by the government? It is fairly obvious it was those who needed them least, people whose incomes and credit were good enough to have borrowed the money from the banks in any event. The small home owner, the pensioner, the widow with a house as her only security, would not have got a loan under this scheme, and perhaps with interest rates a paltry 9½ per cent, or whatever the figure is now, they would not have been anxious to obtain home improvement loans at such rates. In other words, the home improvement loans scheme has been of no help whatever to the group of people who I say are the ones in greatest need of assistance for the maintenance of their homes.

The whole approach of the home improvement loans scheme needs to be rethought. To those in real need of funds for rehabilitation, those on small incomes, government loans

[Mr. Brewin.]

could be made at small or nominal interest rates, with generous terms of repayment either on transfer or sale of the property, or on succession. The income tax structure should be studied to see whether tax exemptions for properly qualified home improvement payments should be allowed.

The minister made it very clear that he would welcome suggestions from members. I would urgently request him to have a serious study made of what can be done by way of loans and tax exemptions to encourage home owners to modernize and maintain their housing. Such policies would lift an immense burden from the backs of those who are today struggling to maintain their homes against the ever-growing burden of taxation and the cost of repairs. It would make a real contribution to the solution of the housing crisis for hundreds of thousands of Canadians. It could be done without immense expense and with the co-operation of provinces, municipalities and the people themselves. I hope that the minister will give this aspect of his duties very serious consideration.

● (4:40 p.m.)

Mr. Philip G. Givens (York West): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this house to speak for the first time and I hope hon. members will be forbearing and charitable in receiving my remarks. I should like my first remarks to be ones of congratulation to the Minister without Portfolio (Mr. Andras) in charge of housing who I thought did a fine and creditable job last week in presenting this bill to the house. Much has been said about whether he is a minister in his own right and the fact that he is a Minister without Portfolio. I understand some of his Indian friends used to say he was a minister without suitcase. In any event housing has now become his bag, whether it is a portfolio or a suitcase. There are those on this side of the house who would like to see him carry this bag well and for a long time. I suppose there are hon. gentlemen opposite who would like to see him left holding the bag.

I have wanted to speak on the subject of housing for a long time, Mr. Speaker, ever since last September when I first came here, but for reasons which are a matter of record you know this has been impossible. So I have had to content myself and be grateful for the wonderful and illuminating instruction I have received on the subjects of wet wheat, corn, fish, baby seals and the Newfie Bullet. I know these things are very important. They must be very important to have taken all the time