

*Supply*

members will note, did she make proposals on what could be done to improve the situation. Instead, she was more interested simply in partisan denunciations of the government.

Over the course of this debate, the House will be showered by statistics of all sorts from all sides. Indeed, I will be relying on some of those myself. Statistics can be very helpful in terms of setting a context which will help us to understand the nature of poverty in Canada and what can be done by the government to deal with it. But statistics can also do damage because they can obscure the true human face of poverty. It can cause us to forget about the millions of different stories of Canadians who find themselves living in poverty in circumstances which are as different as the people themselves.

When I was preparing for my intervention today, my thoughts went to a young woman whom I met in Ottawa a few weeks ago. Though she looked much older, she was only in her late twenties. She was a single mother of one daughter and had moved here hoping to find greater opportunity, hoping to find work which would enable her to support herself and her daughter.

She received no support at all from the child's father. Nor did she seek any. She had taken part-time work which meant that she could no longer get the sort of benefits that other people on welfare could get, but she wanted to be independent and to have the opportunity to support herself and her daughter.

Talking with her was both troubling and enormously heartening in that it showed both the human cost of poverty and something about the tremendous indomitable nature of the human spirit. What she asked from us here in this House was not charity or pity, but opportunity and respect. She richly deserved both of those from all of us.

During this debate we will hear a range of statistics. As I mentioned, I will be using some of them myself, but what we should not ever neglect is the human face of poverty, one which involves the young people from one coast to another, affects their hopes and their dreams, and affects the quality of lives of Canadians who find themselves caught in poverty. It should be these people

and not partisan advantage which should be the focus of our activities today.

I hope that in the time remaining to the House, what we will be doing is concentrating on constructive suggestions in terms of what we can do as members of Parliament and as concerned Canadians in order to deal with so important an issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, I am glad that we are getting together and looking for solutions to the problem of child poverty. Although today's motion contains a number of partisan elements that members on this side of the House will not be able to support, and although we may not agree with the means proposed to achieve the end, I am convinced we are prepared to commit ourselves.

[*English*]

I have two children of my own. This starting point makes me particularly concerned about the issue of child poverty. It is difficult for me to accept, as it should be difficult for any parent in this Chamber to accept, that other children, like our own, should find themselves growing up in conditions of need and hunger without adequate food or shelter.

A few minutes ago the member for Hamilton East painted a picture of a government determined to increase poverty among Canadian children. The facts, however, present a very different picture.

Since the present government took office in 1984, considerable progress has been made on the issue of child poverty. The number of children living in low income circumstances has dropped from 1.1 million in 1984 to 837,000 in 1989. Nevertheless, it troubles me that despite these results there remain children growing up facing immediate hardship. It troubles me that poverty rates are as high as 50 per cent for native children and that low income affects as many as 59 per cent of children in female headed, lone-parent families. Quite simply, what these figures represent, in human terms, is a tremendous challenge for all Canadians.

• (1620)

The task of eliminating poverty, among children by the year 2000, is difficult and challenging. We must recognize