

It was not due to waste. It was not due to laziness, mismanagement, bingo, booze or wilful neglect. It was due to the fact that the families were without money.

Poor kids are poor kids because they are poor kids. If we want to overcome poverty in this country, we have to do something about getting more money into the hands of poor people. That is where we have to start.

On Monday of this week the United Nations adopted the first-ever Convention on the Rights of Child. Canada co-sponsored that landmark agreement. Let us as a Parliament use that as a nation for a starting point. Article 14 of the Convention imposes on us to recognize, and I quote:

—the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

According to this Article we are now obligated to take:

—appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programs, particularly with regard to nutrition, health, clothing and housing.

We can, we must take up our obligations now.

The point that I want to make is that it can be done. In Sweden, Norway and West Germany there is a level of child poverty one-fifth as high as ours. Where over 25 per cent of our children live in poverty, theirs are around 5 per cent. Other societies that have cared, that have targeted the problem, have understood it is a problem, have done something about it.

In Canada, all parties—and I am not going to talk about the political genesis of it beyond that—in the late 1950s and early 1960s recognized that we had a serious problem with our elderly. We saw then that statistically speaking a much greater percentage of senior citizens were living in poverty than the percentage of children living in poverty today. The people of Canada did not sit back, and at one point people in all parties did not sit back. We all have parents. We know senior citizens. We know it is a human right that a man or woman, who spends his or her life working for the nation and with his contribution whatever it is in labour, ought to be able to retire with dignity, not just survive but retire with some dignity.

Supply

We began to move as a country. In the early 1960s we began the important struggle for elderly Canadians. In 1963, 41 per cent of elderly Canadians were poor. The Canada Pension Plan came in. Old age security was significantly improved. Indexation of pensions and pension benefits took place. By 1966, the percentage of elderly couples living in poverty had dropped from 41 per cent to 9.5 per cent. We still have poor citizens. More has to be done, of course. But we made real progress for the elderly.

There is one person who is sitting here—I see him now—who sat here day in and day out, often in the front-benches of the New Democratic Party rows, now before the Speaker, who in particular did a remarkable job for senior citizens, and that is Stanley Knowles.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I say to you if we want to succeed with our children we have to deal as specifically with their poverty as we did with senior citizens. We helped to bring dignity to the lives of the elderly. We must now do that for our children. We must show that for us human dignity is to be cherished as much in life's first pages as it is in the concluding chapters.

I say to the minister that the federal government must show leadership. The Prime Minister said this fall that our goal for social programs must be those that "bring us both peace of mind and pride in citizenship". I agree. All Canadians would agree. I simply say it is time to match the rhetoric with action.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Broadbent: Basically, at the federal level the government must start by increasing the minimum federal wage which is now the lowest in the country and has not been increased in three years. It should be indexed to the cost of living, just as pensions were indexed several years ago. Second, the federal government must increase family allowances and the child tax credit and index them to the rate of inflation. This money goes directly to low—and middle-income families to pay for food, housing and clothing. Third, the federal government must increase federal financing for low-cost housing.