

of Canadian children who are undernourished. More important, the government could take great strides to correct this deplorable situation with a little common sense, human compassion, and understanding for the youth of our country who are victims of poverty through no fault of their own.

My question that day was prompted by an announcement by the Canadian Dairy Commission that there were 400 million pounds of surplus milk products and that they were in a dilemma with regard to finding methods of disposing of it, either offering it to communist countries for less than 14 cents a pound after paying producers 64 cents a pound or, alternatively, selling the surplus as animal food.

● (2210)

I have to wonder, and indeed it is impossible for me to realize, that the government is worried how to dispose of the surplus when to use just one example, the answer is right in front of its eyes. I refer to the National Council of Welfare report on children in poverty, which gives figures indicating that 1.6 million Canadian children are living in poverty. The simple answer is, as I have said on several occasions, to introduce a national school food program, already the subject of study by various provinces.

I feel very strongly about the alarming and frightening facts brought out in the report entitled "Poor Kids." This report should be read by every member of parliament. More, it should be read by all those in our bureaucracy who spend so many millions on such programs as Sports Canada or Recreation Canada. They seem to think the road to success is to produce champions who win gold medals, by directing all efforts to the few who, thank God, happen to have the basic attributes to be developed to that stage where they can compete.

I ask the question: what do we do with those one and a half million of our children who don't have the basic start in life to be able to participate in sports because they happen to be poor? I should like to refer to only one paragraph of that report to emphasize that they either don't know, or don't care to realize that the answer to ensuring a physically fit Canada is not to produce a few champions but to ensure the physical development of all Canadians. The championships and the gold medals will then take care of themselves.

I wish to quote from a paragraph in the report as follows:

School is where the child of the poor... who is restless... cannot concentrate... is cranky and sleepy... is seen as a case for the psychologist... when what he needs is a real breakfast or lunch... and not an analyst's designation as a problem child.

The reason he falls within this category is because he is not getting the fundamental, basic nutrition, either because his parents are too poor to provide the proper food or are unaware of what a child needs to eat to build up his or her young body and mind properly.

Commenting on representation with respect to a school food program, the minister advised me that pilot projects were taking place in two of the eastern provinces. I found that one project in Prince Edward Island is operating on a research study grant financed by the federal government and is being undertaken by the University of Prince Edward Island, with three schools involved, as are many of

the other provinces in Canada. Many individual schools are exploring the best methods of initiating school lunch programs. But I say to the minister that it is the responsibility of the federal government to take the lead in implementing a national school food program for one fundamental reason—to ensure the proper physical development of children who are the victims of poverty or lack of parental guidance and concern.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that I became very disturbed when I received in my office a fancy folder entitled "The Fit Kit", which is designed to show adult Canadians how to keep fit, and I say to the minister that we need a Kit on Youth Canada or Nutrition Canada. I also say that in order to have a strong Canada we must concentrate more effort on our youth, even to the point of establishing a ministry of youth.

The frightening and embarrassing situation which exposed the 400 million pounds of milk product surplus had its day in court on March 2 and, unfortunately, was not the sexiest of topics with which we in parliament are concerned. But I have to say that it is a blemish on government and even on this parliament that such a topic is passed over so lightly by each and every one of us here. I conclude by making this plea: In view of the government's responsibility to all Canadians, whether they be rich or poor, and in view of the disturbing number of under-nourished children in Canada and the consequence this will have on the quality of future Canadians, the government should provide emergency assistance, making use of the known surplus of milk products, and create immediately a food distribution program in all Canadian schools to raise the nutritional level of Canada's poor children and ensure thereby the discharge of our responsibility to Canada's future.

**Mr. Bob Kaplan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, as far as the government is concerned let me assure the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) that this is not a subject that the government regards lightly. There is no moral defence to the wasting of enormous quantities of surplus skim milk powder or its apparent spoilage, not only because the world is full of malnourished people but because in our own country, as the hon. member has noted, there are far too many of our own children suffering from inadequate and improper nutrition.

I want to explain to the hon. member that the surplus milk we are talking about is not a permanent stock. It is not a surplus that will endure and upon which a sensible long-term or even short-term program can be built. It is a temporary surplus. It is a surplus that should never really have come into existence and which will not exist in the future.

The Government of Canada is very concerned about the nutrition of our children. At present various initiatives are under way. For example, guidelines for school lunch programs, developed in collaboration with provincial health officials, are nearing completion and will be available for distribution this coming summer. In addition, in collaboration with the government of Alberta, an evaluation is being conducted of a school lunch program for native children, and this evaluation is in its third year. Also a