

Children dependent on welfare in British Columbia can meet daily nutritional requirements according to medical reports that have been done for only two and a half weeks per month. What are they going to do for the other one and a half weeks? Well, they suffer; that is what they do.

While the rest of us are well off, while the rest of us go to restaurants, while the rest of us have lots of pleasure, these kids are suffering. We should be suffering when we think about it so that we will move and put an end to it.

• (1020)

Being a poor kid means box lunches from food banks and soup from soup kitchens. Children make up 26 per cent of the population, but they make up 40 per cent of the users of food banks in Canada.

Around Thanksgiving I was speaking somewhere here in my home province. I picked up a copy of *The Toronto Star* and in that paper on Thanksgiving weekend, when most of us are with our families and enjoying our families and when most of us have lots to be thankful for, I saw a report that in Toronto, our richest city, there were 34,000 Canadians who could not feed themselves adequately. Over half that 34,000 were under five years of age. They have inadequate diets.

There are more food banks in Toronto than McDonald's hamburger outlets. Perhaps if we had neon signs in front of every food bank in the city of Toronto and in every city across Canada, when we drove around in this country of ours we would become as aware of poverty, and particularly poverty for young kids, as we are of McDonald's hamburgers.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, to be a poor kid means trying to read or write or think on an empty stomach.

A Harvard medical study has shown a direct link between poor nutrition and the ability to concentrate, so important in the learning process. A survey of 132 public schools in Calgary reported that in 46 schools, the number of children coming to school without breakfast was a serious problem.

It is not surprising that poor children are twice as likely to drop out of school as other children.

*Supply*

[English]

In Canada we know—and in every country where studies have been done they know it—that rich kids are not inherently better than poor kids, that they do not have a greater capacity to become musicians, poets, good hockey players or great skiers. The poor in our nation genetically have the same capacities over all, statistically, as the rich kids. But as every study shows if you are suffering from malnutrition and you are underhoused and you have all of the concomitant negative effects on your life that goes with that, you are not likely to do as well in the learning process, by a considerable proportion, as the rich or the average.

It is time we took our obligations seriously to ensure that every kid in this country has the right and the same right to develop his or her capacities and talents, that the child in Cape Breton Island ought to have the same opportunities to be what he or she can as the child in Rosedale in Toronto.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, to be poor means to be homeless and without hope. Three years ago, 30,000 children were looking for a place to sleep in shelters for the homeless. Others lived on the street or with poor families who skimped on food to pay the rent.

[English]

There is now in Canada and in the United States a vicious cycle involving the poor. Poor kids are undernourished, underhoused, more sickly, more poorly educated, get the second or third rate jobs, and when the lay-offs come, they get laid off first.

The same young people marry each other and then they produce children, statistically out of proportion, who go through the same cycle. We have a cycle of poor food, poor housing, poor clothing, poor education, poor jobs, poor spouses, more poor kids. This is a vicious cycle. It is a vicious cycle that can be broken and it is a vicious cycle that must be broken in this Canada of ours.

Our children, 25 per cent of them, are imprisoned in poverty and we must get them out of that prison. There is a problem in this relatively well off democracy of ours in dealing with this. It is to get the problem recognized for what it is. It is to get people reasonably well off to care about the problem so that they will come to grips with it.