

Supply

we have thousands of kids, indeed 151,000 children, using food banks each month.

While we in Canada have witnessed in the statistics that Mercedes Benzes and Porsches and Cadillacs are selling in record numbers, one quarter of our children are wasting away. This is a national horror. This is a national shame. It is a horror and a shame that we should put an end to.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, one of the major obligations of our democratic responsibilities—and I say this to all members on both sides of the House—is to improve the well-being of the majority. That is a fundamental requirement of a democratic society.

It is also a requirement to go back to an old-fashioned and for me fundamental notion of democracy which predates the view that you have a democracy simply if you have a competitive political system, legal institutions and the rule of law. The early 19th century and pre-19th century notion of democracy was that you had a society, not just governmental institutions as important as they are, so organized that all of its members had fully equal opportunities to develop their capacities and talents as human beings. It is to that notion of democracy that we in Canada should be committing ourselves.

When we apply this test we have to understand particularly here, now, in our generation, that we have the obligation of persuading a majority of Canadians to take on the task in the interests of a minority, in the interests of our poor, in the interests in particular of poor children.

In my maiden speech 21 years ago I noted in the euphoria of that time at the end of the 1960s that our task as a people was not simply to praise our past and celebrate our present. I said that our task was to create a future, a different future, to defend what we have, and that to refuse to go beyond was to refuse to lead. We have an obligation always in this chamber to lead.

For too long we have refused to go beyond into the future when it comes to our children. For too long we have ignored the appalling poverty in the midst of affluence. For years the United States and Canada had

been regarded not only here in North America but around the world as the world's two most affluent nations and in many criteria well beyond average personal income, this remains true today. However, today also among industrial states, Canada has the second highest rate of children living in a condition of severe poverty. We are second only in this terrible indicator to the United States.

I want now to get beyond the abstractions of some of these statistics.

[*Translation*]

What is the face of poverty? It is dangerously underweight babies. It is infant deaths. The infant mortality rate of the poor is twice as high as that of the rich. Physicians in Quebec have stated that babies born in certain poor areas of the province run the risk of being as underweight as babies in developing countries.

Poverty means chronic illness, infection and viral diseases. The rate of poor children in poor health is 150 per cent higher than the national average. This is appalling!

A recent study on poverty in Regina mentioned babies who were brought to the emergency ward with convulsions because mothers had diluted their milk to make it go further. We cannot allow this to happen!

[*English*]

An Ontario study found that being on welfare was one of the best and surest indicators of discovering a child with chronic health problems. Welfare payments are totally inadequate to deal with that problem.

Third, the face of poverty is malnutrition. It means going to school without breakfast and going to bed at night hungry. Again in the same recent study in Saskatchewan that I picked up and read when I was recently out there, it showed that a youngster from school during the summer vacation of two months lost 25 pounds. The weight was checked before school recessed and checked when the kids came back to school. Some 25 pounds in weight was lost by that child because the school lunches that that child was getting during the school year were not being provided at home during the summer in that it was a very poor family.

I repeat, this is happening in Canada 1989, not 1939.