

*Supply*

children whose survival depends on our fortitude and generosity, whose future we can help chart and whose future, when secure, shall determine the health and greatness of our nation.

Today we have before us the opposition day motion introduced by my colleague from Hamilton East, which I was honoured to second. This motion shall call once more to the consciousness of all Canadians, the plight of our poor children and asks that their needs be met with more than words.

Children are the innocent victims of economics. During the last recession of the 1980s, there was a jump in the number of children living below the poverty line. What will happen now, as we are once again in the grips of economic strife? I fear the worst for the children of the poor. As a father and a paediatrician, it greatly saddens me to see a child become ill. Tragically, poverty cannot pay for a clean bill of health.

On average seven Canadian babies in one thousand do not survive infancy. For the poor, that number is twice as high. For native Indian children, the death toll is not seven or eight or nine per thousand; it is 19. For Inuit, 28 in 1,000 babies do not live. Over all the life expectancy of a poor boy is five and a half years less than a rich boy, while a poor girl lives two fewer years. Poor children are involved in four times as many traffic accidents. They die two to ten times more often from fires, drowning, suicide, homicide, and respiratory infections. Cancers and substance abuse are much more likely to strike down poor children.

Why? Unsafe, crowded housing, inadequate access to medical care, poor compliance with therapy, and poor nutrition provide some explanations. Other answers are much more complex.

A high percentage of underweight babies are born to poverty stricken parents, suggesting less than adequate pre-natal care. These infants, if they survive, often suffer from brain dysfunction, cerebral palsy, major visual and hearing defects, and epilepsy. Underweight babies also tend to have a lower than average IQ. Poor mothers breast feed less often and for a shorter time than mothers from higher income families. Their babies often become anaemic, weighing half a kilogram less than average and measuring two centimetres less in

height. Even their tiny heads are one centimetre less in circumference.

The health problems among poor children seem to be never ending, not only physical and nutritional but dental and psychological. Some hospitals have noticed a rise in meningitis and diarrhoea among them. Absenteeism at school increases. Dental records reveal more cavities, missing and filled teeth. Mental illness occurs one and a half to three times more frequently.

These Canadian child paupers are such a grave concern that in 1988 seven social service organizations banded together, forming the Child Poverty Coalition, in an effort to save them. The coalition's aim is to make child poverty a national priority.

All social conscious groups, like the National Council of Welfare and the social planning councils in many provinces, recognize the problem. So too do the Liberal Party, the soup kitchens, the media, child and health care workers, and anyone else with eyes that see reality.

Why is the government blind to the issue? Why has the government not made children a priority? Why does the government hide behind public relations ruses? I speak about the Prime Minister acting as co-chair of the recent United Nations World Summit for Children. Did his international posing help our own struggling children, or did it convince the world that a hungry child is not a Canadian child? Recently my hon. colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, told the House about his government's record on reducing child poverty in Canada.

• (1720)

While I am pleased as well that there has been a drop in child poverty between 1984 and 1989, is it fair to compare a recession year to a non-recession year? If we compare the pre-recession year of 1980 to the year 1989, we must admit that there was no significant change in the rate of poverty among Canadian children. It was 14.8 per cent in 1980 and 14.6 per cent in 1989. The disturbing situation remains, and we still have one million poor children.

A poor child is usually a hungry child. In fact, 40 per cent of food bank dependents are children. Food, something we take for granted, is precious to the hungry and lack thereof translates into more social and health problems for the thousands who are strangers to regular,