

Supply

only going to be partisan. He challenged us to put forward ideas to help this situation.

First of all, I do not think there is a member of Parliament in this House who has not had some personal experience with real poverty in his riding. In my own riding alone, 25 per cent of the children who go to all the schools have single parents. We all know what is going on in this country. I do not want to play with any of the statistics.

As I listened to the minister, I recalled what happened this summer when all of a sudden the Prime Minister, through Order in Council, sent the ships off to the Persian Gulf. All of a sudden, moneys were found and away they went.

I am also very respectful of the deficit. I would like to ask the minister, because sometimes when one is in health and welfare, one does not think of some of the various resources. However, the minister, having been a former Minister of National Defence, is well aware of the 500 to 600 armouries that exist across this country, especially in the major urban centres. Most of the time these amouries are sitting idle. There are many good men and women in the militia who make a great contribution to our community.

During this very special period of Christmas and the new year, when times are tough and the economy is extraordinarily tough, there is an extraordinary burden on the Minister of Finance, why could we not take a page out of the organization in Toronto which organizes the food bank day? It is only for one day at the CNE but the volunteers manage to gather enough food to feed people for a couple of weeks. Why couldn't the minister co-ordinate this sort of thing with the Minister of National Defence and not just sort of quote that "things are getting better and there are fewer people on the poverty line". Let us make a real two month or three month action plan and put the kind of will behind it, not unlike the kind of will that we put behind sending men and women to the Persian Gulf.

I would ask the minister what he would think of that as a possible suggestion. I am not suggesting it is long term, but it may bridge things and help ease some of the pain and create some hope.

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest and great attention to the hon. member's suggestion. I want to give his suggestion the seriousness that it deserves. I have some difficulty understanding exactly what it was he was proposing that we should be doing.

He made reference first of all to the Prime Minister sending troops to the Middle East by Order in Council during the summer and then went from that to some reference to armouries in Canada without specifying what he had in mind to do with the armouries.

Mr. Mills: Using the armouries to act as food banks, et cetera and support systems for the poor.

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, members of Canada's Armed Forces and certainly members of our reserve forces are involved on a continuing basis in contributing to their communities and to doing anything that they can to be helpful. In cases where there are programs that they can put in place using armouries, they are glad to do so, using the resources that they have available.

If there is one thing that certainly characterizes the spirit of the men and women whom I was privileged to serve with when I was Minister of National Defence, it was a very deep sense of commitment to the community in which they served. I know that their approach in every single instance when it is possible for them to make a contribution was to do everything they could to do so.

• (1640)

The hon. member also made a juxtaposition—and I hope he will forgive me if I pick up on that as well—between the money we are spending on the armed forces, perhaps to send troops to the Middle East, and money we are spending in other areas.

I am in this House uniquely positioned to make a comment on that as a former Minister of National Defence who is now Minister of National Health and Welfare. We in this society benefit enormously, and my children are an example, from growing up in a society in freedom and in tolerance. The men and women who serve in Canada's Armed Forces do so in order to ensure that all Canadians, particularly all Canadian children, will live in freedom from fear and that they will be protected against threats which could take away the freedom that we enjoy and consider part of our birthright as Canadians.