

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 24, 1989

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 81—ELIMINATING POVERTY AMONG
CANADIAN CHILDREN

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa) moved:

That this House express its concern for the more than one million Canadian children currently living in poverty and seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues.

[*English*]

One morning in the middle of June, lying in my bed, the alarm clock went off on my clock radio and I listened, as I usually do each morning, to the morning CBC news. On this particular day the news I heard was deeply distressing. The report on that particular morning was that we have in this country of ours 1,121,000 children living in poverty.

Normally I had been reasonably well aware, given my responsibility as the Leader of the New Democratic Party, of the general social policy oriented data, if I can put it in those very abstract terms, but I frankly say that on that particular morning I was totally surprised by how serious the problem of child poverty in Canada had become.

I went to my office that very morning, checked with members of our research staff and asked them to get me a copy of the report on child poverty which had just been produced and which formed the basis of the CBC news report.

It turned out that the figures used were true. There were well over a million poor kids in this Canada of ours in 1989, not 1939; in Canada, a developed industrial society, not a poor emerging nation in the Third World.

The situation is bad for our children. For the rest of us, no matter how we have been burdened by tax increases, no matter how hard done by we feel when we cannot buy an extra suit that we might have planned on, take our families out to another restaurant for a dinner on a given week, or have a more extended holiday, that is the reality for a majority of Canadians.

It is certainly our task as a party, our task as parliamentarians, to be constantly trying to improve the well-being of the majority, but the well-being of the majority in recent years has been improving. While this has been going on in our country, the well-being of a significant number of our kids has been getting worse.

• (1010)

From 1980 to 1986, when the child population of Canada actually fell by some 4 per cent, the number living in poverty in Canada at precisely the time the rest of us were doing better increased by 13.4 per cent.

A few years after I was elected to the House of Commons a survey was taken in 1973. In 1973 it was found in this land of ours that 21 per cent of our kids were poor. The most recent figure, according to the Canadian Council on Social Development, is that this percentage has increased from 21 per cent to 25 per cent, one child out of four from Newfoundland in the east to British Columbia in the west. Some provinces are obviously much worse than others, not necessarily because of the different political regimes but certainly because of the different capacities of the different regions to generate growth.

I repeat, while the over-all sense of well-being for most Canadians has been getting better, that of our children has been getting worse. While the rest of us have been better clothed, there are more kids going without shoes. While the rest of us have improved housing, we have literally thousands of children who are homeless in Canada. While the majority now take their families out to a restaurant from time to time for a meal,