

*Oral Question***CHILD CARE**

**Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. The minister knows, as we were talking about it in debate earlier this morning, that there is not only a serious but a growing problem of poverty among Canada's children.

There are in fact more than 1,000 bodies active from coast to coast in Canada, providing food for the poor, including 151,000 children every month. Food banks are growing so rapidly that they are now outpacing the number of McDonald's outlets in the country. In the city of Toronto there are more food banks than McDonald's outlets.

Given the expression of concern that we heard from him this measure announced on the part of the government to deal with the serious problem—will the minister on behalf of the government now tell us what measures the government is taking to alleviate this alarming situation.

**Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why the hon. gentleman has not heard yet of the government's proposals is that the very eloquent speech that he gave went on for some 40 minutes. I have not had a chance to complete my remarks. I hope over the course of my remarks following Question Period to talk about some of the initiatives that we have taken and some of our goals in terms of eliminating child poverty.

Our approach is essentially twofold. The first is to ensure that in transfers to individuals and to families, adequate assistance is given to ensure that we can deal with problems of poverty. The second, which he did not deal with in his remarks, was the question of ensuring prosperity and growth in Canada which creates opportunity for all Canadians.

As a result of the government's policies, we have significantly decreased the number of Canadians in poverty over the course of the last five years, including the number of Canadian children in poverty.

**Mr. Broadbent:** Mr. Speaker, I say to the minister that I look forward to hearing the concluding part of his speech after Question Period, but I also want to say that the government's reliance on continual growth in the

economy will not be adequate in the future just as it has not been in the past.

The economy has been growing in the last few years, but while it has been growing the situation for children has been getting worse. There has been over a 13 per cent increase in poverty among children in recent years.

In those things that he may be announcing this afternoon, will the government now deal with the level of the federal minimum wage? The federal minimum wage now is the lowest in all of Canada, lower than all the provinces. An increase in the federal minimum wage would not cost the federal treasury scarcely a cent. It would be obligatory for all those companies working within federal jurisdictional authority. Will the federal government now show some leadership to the provinces by announcing an immediate increase in the level of the federal minimum wage?

**Mr. Beatty:** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. gentleman knows it is not for the Minister of National Health and Welfare to announce changes to the federal minimum wage. Obviously that is a question which should be put elsewhere.

The hon. member should be careful when he uses statistics. He has been here long enough to recognize the fact that the base that is used is very important in determining what the statistics mean.

The hon. gentleman says there has been a 13 per cent increase in child poverty. As he will recall, in my remarks I took as the base line 1984 when this government came into office. In 1984, more than 1.1 million children lived in poverty. By 1987, that number had dropped to under a million. That is a 20 per cent decrease.

The hon. gentleman may say that there are fewer children, the birth rate has fallen. It has not fallen by 20 per cent. The fact is that the number of Canadians living in poverty and the number of children living in poverty has decreased during the term of this government in office. It has not increased. I think the hon. gentleman should recognize that fact.

**Mr. Broadbent:** Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that we are operating with different statistics, but as has been the case in the past if the government has statistics which show that the degree of the problem is not what I said it was compared to recent years, I am quite prepared to accept that.