

*Adjournment Debate*

I also have in my riding a unique food service. St. Francis Table offers a full meal consisting of soup, meat, potatoes, salad, dessert, coffee and tea for which it charges only \$1 to help defray the costs. With volunteer help, they serve 4,000 to 5,000 meals a month within a five-day week. Half its clientele is made up of people on some type of social assistance. One-quarter are ordinary, average senior citizens and the others are transients and refugees. Very recently, St. Francis Table had to move to a larger facility to accommodate the growing number of Canadians accepting its charity.

When I visit St. Francis Table I ask what is the main reason that forces users to live under these conditions. Nine times out of ten I am told that it is a choice between shelter and food: once they have paid for their shelter, they have no money left for food.

This may not be the case in other towns or cities, but in Toronto where there is so little affordable housing people are literally being forced to trade off one essential for another. The number of people using food banks in metro Toronto is over 84,000, a number equal to the population of Kingston. Over the period of a year, one-quarter of a million people have had to utilize a food bank of one type or another at least once.

These people have an average of \$23 a week left over once their shelter has been paid. There are not many of us who can conceive paying for food, transportation, clothing, medicine, et cetera, for \$23 a week. One in eight food bank households earns less or brings home less money than its shelter costs. The inevitable reality for these people is homelessness.

This cannot be allowed to go on. We have to get together on a federal level working with the provinces and municipalities to see how best this crisis can be addressed. In a country as rich as ours, we all have to have the political will to work toward a common goal, a goal to eliminate poverty in Canada. We can start with step one: eliminate the need for food banks.

• (1815)

**Mr. Ken James (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour):** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today on a subject of primary concern to us as Canadians. I would like to remind the member for Parkdale—High Park that all Canadians, regardless of their political affiliation, cannot rest and be satisfied as

long as even one family is suffering from poverty in this country. I commend him for his keen interest in this problem.

Canadians generally enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world and one of this government's priorities will be to maintain and improve the standard of living for Canadians and their children in the future in Canada.

The sound basis to assure a better future for Canadians and to protect our social safety net is a very healthy and prosperous economy, and in order for it to be a truly caring society, Canada's wealth and prosperity must be shared with those who are less fortunate and are in the greatest need.

Let us first address the issue of growth and prosperity. There is no question that the policies of this government have contributed to the economic growth in Canada. Since 1984 this government has embarked on a program of revitalizing the country. In just five years, as a result of the economic policies, more than 1.6 million new jobs have been created, the majority of them full time jobs. That is important to people who can now make money and take care of themselves.

Canadians in need have been able to benefit from this growth. Since 1984, some 760,000 persons have escaped poverty and average income has risen in that period of time by about 8 per cent. This government has taken the necessary steps to help those most in need and to ensure economic growth can continue.

Despite these important achievements, most Canadians are aware that the country is facing a serious debt problem and last year more money was spent on interest payments to service our national debt than all the programs administered by the Department of National Health and Welfare put together, more than the cost of national health care programs, welfare programs, old age security and family allowances. We end up spending more money on our debt problem than on all those important programs.

Clearly these public debt charges have been putting a lot of pressure on spending priorities and expanding into the social safety net. The survival of these programs depends on the prosperity of this country and we mean to continue that important job.