

Oral Questions

When it comes to dealing with the problems of the poor or of any socially progressive movement, the Liberal Party talks yes, but it votes no.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Mr. Speaker, this year, half a million Canadians turned to food banks each month in the hope of surviving the last two years of this government.

Will the minister commit today to visit some of the nation's 200 food banks during Christmas so he can see first-hand the poverty that his government has so callously ignored?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, not only do I make a practice of visiting facilities across the country which serve Canadians—whether they be food banks, child care centres or a whole range of other facilities—but I think it is important as well that the hon. member take advantage of the coming season to visit with some of the Canadians who have found jobs in the last six years.

The hon. member should meet some of the mothers who, for the first time, have been able to find employment, who have seen their children rising out of poverty, and who have seen a doubling of the child tax credit. She should talk with Canadians who for so long languished under Liberal complacency and who saw opportunities presented to them as more than one million Canadians have found new jobs.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, today yet another independent agency, the Toronto Dominion Bank, came out with a report that said: "This is the second worst recession since World War II". It blames, and again I quote: "federal government policies implemented by the Bank of Canada".

My question is to the Minister of Finance. Now that the United States has cut its bank rate to 6.5 per cent, even though the United States inflation rate is higher than here in Canada, will this government cut interest

rates here in Canada in a major way so as to help the hungry and the unemployed in this period of despair as Christmas comes forward?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, we have been cutting interest rates on a very regular basis starting back in May of this year when the Bank of Canada rate was 14.05 per cent. Last week it was 12.01 per cent. It will be lower tomorrow when the treasury bill auction takes place.

We have been responding to the weakness in the economy with a continuous reduction in interest rates. As I responded to a previous questioner, the interest rate spread between the United States and Canada has narrowed by some 150 basis points during the same period of time.

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is to the Minister of Finance. I think we have seen clear that this government has failed to protect those who will suffer from this recession in which we are living clearly.

Over 17,000 Canadians use food banks every day, 500,000 a month. That is up 30 per cent over last year. Over 1.9 million Canadians live on welfare. Instead of offering a helping hand to Canada's poor, this government has handed them a kick in the teeth by placing a cap on the Canada Assistance Plan.

At this time of Christmas, with a hard winter ahead and with poverty and hunger increasing dramatically in this country, will the minister just once change his mind, do just one thing to help Canada's poor and take the cap off the Canada Assistance Plan?

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the cap on the Canada Assistance Plan is a cap of an increase of some 5 per cent over last year in the three most prosperous provinces in Canada.

In his province, for example, there is no cap whatsoever on the Canada Assistance Plan. This year, we will be transferring to the provinces some \$5.8 billion in terms of assistance under the Canada Assistance Plan.

It is time for members of the opposition to be honest with Canadians. In view of the fact that every Canadian has in their name in Ottawa a share of the national debt amounting to some \$13,000, is it his recommendation, and the recommendation of the NDP that we should