

Supply

sufficient flexibility, it would meet the needs of members on all sides of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): There has not been agreement. Do we go for 20 and 10 and if the respective parties would like to designate their own party as ten and five when they get up to speak, that would be fine. I am at the disposal of the House.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, again, I like the idea although I have noticed when you calculate the times you have managed to freeze out the last two New Democrat speakers because we are starting late.

I am quite prepared to undertake to maximize the number of participants in this important debate. I cannot do anything but agree with the minister that this is an important debate, particularly in light of the fact that it was initiated a year ago by the then leader of the New Democratic Party.

I would agree with my colleague's proposals to have the parties decide whether they want to break their sections into ten and fives, with the undertaking to my two colleagues that prior to completing this debate there would be ample time after the first round to have two speakers from the New Democratic Party. If not, I do not see any advantage in agreeing to this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I think we should just start off with 20 and 10, as proposed. Debate.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, I think it is appropriate that 15 days before Christmas, we take this opportunity in the House today to pause and reflect for a moment on what it is that we are really here for.

Frankly, I, myself, in reviewing the package of government actions since 1984, was shocked to examine the extent to which the Tory knife has cut deep into the hearts of poor children and poor families in the country.

I moved this particular motion, not as the end to the problem of poverty, but rather as one opportunity for the House in a full and frank way to discuss a number of issues which touch Canadians living in poverty. Over the next several hours, Mr. Speaker, you will hear from

members of our caucus who will address very specific concerns bringing to bear their expertise in the area.

One of the things that shocked me—and I think it probably shocks a lot of Canadians—is that not only do we know that almost 1 million Canadian children live in poverty, but that 1.4 million Canadians must rely on food banks to supplement their daily bread.

Forty per cent of those people are children who, by virtue of the fact that they do not have enough to eat, are not able to excel in school, are 1.7 times more likely to have psychiatric disorders, are 1.8 times more likely to perform poorly in school, and are twice as likely to have conduct disorders. Poor children are the kind of children left to repeat grades more often than children from families who are not poor. Twice as many poor children fall behind in educational achievement by the age of 15. They become the drop-outs whom millions of government dollars are hopefully trying to encourage to stay in school.

We have to deal, as a government and as a political party, with how we intend to wipe out poverty. The first thing we have to do is examine what has happened over the past six years.

Mr. Speaker, I think you will agree with me that the last six years have dealt a real blow to families and children in the country. I was shocked myself to learn of the kinds of deep cuts that have been brought about by the government to programs that are directed towards helping the poor and, in particular, helping children.

The very specific major cutbacks in EPF transfer payments will cut approximately \$22 billion from medicare over the next 10 years. If you set aside the EPF transfer payments, and look at other federal government programs, Mr. Speaker, directed towards poor families, what you will find as a result of Tory policies is \$20 billion in spending has been cut from families, children, and elderly people who most need the resources.

In constant dollars, the cutbacks of the child benefit system beginning with the family allowance in 1986 cut \$1.6 billion from the pockets of Canadian families to help children. The deindexation of child benefits in the tax structure cut \$3.5 billion from the program between 1986 and 1991. The clawback of the family allowance and the old age security will cut \$215 million in spending this