

*Adjournment Debate*

farmers. The price for many of our agricultural exports is set in world markets and domestic prices must remain stable to allow us to compete effectively internationally.

Interest rate increases over the past few years have occurred in the context of very strong growth in demand in relation to the economy's productive capacity to produce goods and services, with resulting inflationary pressures. More recently there have been some signs that demand is slowing down, but inflation has remained high. Meaningful interest rate reductions will occur as the risk of inflation recedes. To take on additional risks on inflation at this time would be counterproductive.

The rise of the Canadian dollar over the last two years has been a reflection of many factors, not just interest rates. The strength of our economy and investor confidence in Canada's prospects have been major factors. The experience of the 1970s and early 1980s clearly shows that one of the biggest threats to the competitiveness of Canadian producers is higher inflation.

The government will remain committed to lowering inflation in order to lay the foundation for sustained economic growth in all sectors of the economy. I think Canadian farmers will benefit from durably lower interest rates and stable prices.

FOOD BANKS

**Mr. Jesse Flis (Parkdale—High Park):** Madam Speaker, on February 14, I rose in this House and addressed an important issue that is of growing concern to many of us. The issue is the overwhelming increase in the number of Canadians who use food banks regularly for their daily sustenance.

I had received a letter and two documents from the Daily Bread Food Bank, a food bank in my riding, describing on a national level and on a local level the scope of this phenomenon. One of the documents entitled *Canadian Hunger Count 1989* was based on special surveys carried out by food bank organizations in 65 Canadian cities and towns, which represents over half the population of the country, covering 907 emergency grocery and meal programs in the month of March 1989.

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The findings indicated that nearly 400,000 people in Canada resort to food and charitable food programs. Of these 400,000 Canadians, 87 per cent get groceries to

prepare at home but 13 per cent or over 50,000 Canadians are served communal meals at soup kitchens, children's breakfast programs, drop-ins and shelters. These figures are based on any given month. Applied nationally on an annual basis, the findings indicate that Canadians who use food banks run in the order of 1.4 million, that is, every year 1.4 million Canadians are compelled to rely on the kindness of strangers to feed themselves and their families.

The most alarming of these findings is that although 26 per cent of the population of Canada is under 18, children and youth make up 40 per cent of those using food banks. Hungercount warns, and I quote: "children are twice as likely to be fed by food from a charitable food program as adults".

Although there are some among us who feel that the situation in which these Canadians find themselves is self-fulfilled, a survey of public attitudes taken by Gallup in April 1989 found that 67 per cent of Canadians feel that this crisis is a serious problem in Canada, and close to 70 per cent of Canadians feel that government has a responsibility to solve this problem.

The 87 per cent of Canadians who depend on food banks depend on social assistance, unemployment insurance, old age pensions and disability allowances. Yet, instead of increasing aid either directly or indirectly through improved access to education and training, what has the government done? It has cut back. It has cut back on benefits and education as we saw in the last budget.

This is not a partisan issue. What I have presented in the House are facts. Poverty and hunger know no politics. We in the House should stop playing politics with the very lives of our fellow Canadians. Although there was a motion presented in the House in November 1989, supported by all three parties, there are as many without food and shelter today as there were before the introduction of that motion. Motions do not put food on the table.

The Daily Bread Food Bank distributes 650,000 pounds of food to 11 different food banks in my riding alone. These food banks serve approximately 2,500 people a month. In January and February of this year, they have already distributed 58,000 pounds of food compared to 43,000 pounds during the same period in 1989.