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### **Neglect of poorest kids means foodbank use is no mystery, say child advocates**

In the wake of a Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) report showing increasing use of foodbanks and their impact on children, National Party spokeswoman Judith Collins says she “can’t understand” why child poverty exists in New Zealand, “in this day and age.”

Child Poverty Action Group believes it ought not to exist here either, but says extensive research shows why it does. “Due to policy neglect by successive governments, a dramatic redistribution of money away from families with children has been allowed to take place over the last two decades,” says CPAG director Janfrie Wakim. “It has not yet been reversed. For many years our poorest children have been receiving the least when it comes to family assistance policy in this country.”

Perhaps Judith Collins has not swotted up on her own party’s dubious achievements in this area. National’s last time in government saw cutbacks and inflation ravage subsistence-level family incomes and child poverty peak at 34%.

Adding insult to injury, the National-NZ First government’s Child Tax Credit was designed to sort deserving children from the rest when it came to state support - according to whether or not their parents were in paid work. The forthcoming tenth birthday of that divisive, failed policy is certainly nothing to celebrate, as it has further entrenched poverty among the poorest children.

The government’s latest attempt to reverse the neglect of family incomes, Working for Families, looks set to continue to leave the very poorest behind, roughly 175,000 of them. This despite the well-recognised inadequacy of the lowest family incomes at a time of great economic prosperity, which has been amply illustrated by record foodbank statistics from the country’s most authoritative source, the Auckland City Mission. Is it any wonder that principals in low-decile schools tell us that hunger in the classroom is hampering poor kids’ chances of beating the odds.”

Only the poorest children are reliant on food parcels. Judith Collins promises that National will “do its best” for these kids; CPAG is yet to be convinced. “So far we have only seen National-led policies do their worst, while child poverty reduction policy has never even been on the party’s agenda to date,” says Janfrie. “Meanwhile, if Labour is as serious about eliminating child poverty as Steve Maharey says they are, our most vulnerable children ought to be its priority.”

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