

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[English]***THE ECONOMY**

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister, in the absence of the Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance keeps talking about the economic crisis as a restructuring problem. I would like to ask the Acting Prime Minister how he intends to restructure the situation facing people lined up at food banks in this country. What is he going to do to restructure the situation so 700,000 children do not have to line up at 1,300 food banks? What is he going to do to restructure the fact that one in ten of the people living in homeless shelters across this country are children?

Are they part of the restructuring problem, and what is his solution?

Hon. John McDermid (Minister of State (Finance and Privatization)): Mr. Speaker, I believe that the record on help to children by this government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McDermid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe the record on help that this government has given to children over the years speaks for itself.

I might say to the hon. member that there is a commitment by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, there is a commitment by the Prime Minister of this country, and there is a commitment by the Minister of Finance to take a look at the situation as to the affairs of young people, children. I am sure that she will hear some news in the not too distant future in that regard.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Acting Prime Minister.

The Minister of Finance is so intent on defending failed policies that he has closed his mind to constructive alternatives. Yesterday he went on the attack against the idea of a national shared-cost public works program. I hope the Acting Prime Minister will take a more constructive attitude.

The FCM today has written to the Prime Minister asking that a national public works program be placed on

the agenda of the First Ministers' Conference next Monday.

Will the Acting Prime Minister today, along with the Prime Minister, announce that the federal government will launch such a program? Or, at the very least, will he use the opportunity of the First Ministers' Conference next week to explore this much needed idea with the premiers across this country?

Hon. John McDermid (Minister of State (Finance and Privatization)): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister of Canada has made it very clear to the premiers that he is prepared to sit down and discuss any item that might be of benefit to Canada.

• (1420)

At the same time he is aware of the fiscal restraints that we have in this country, that all provinces have, that all provincial premiers including the New Democratic Party premiers are talking about now, that they have to cut costs and they have to watch their expenditures because, as Premier Harcourt of British Columbia said, we cannot spend our way out of a recession.

I might say to the hon. member the other thing we have to remember is that the Liberal plan is asking for a billion dollars from the federal government, a billion dollars from provincial governments, and a billion dollars from municipal governments, all coming from one person, the taxpayer, the guy who pays the buck. There is only one person who pays all three billion dollars. I am not sure that municipalities are prepared to go to their taxpayers today and ask for another billion dollars.

Ms. Copps: I would like to know who the minister thinks is currently paying unemployment insurance and welfare benefits, because it is those same people who would prefer to pay money to put people back to work.

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[Translation]

**GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND
TRADE**

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): My supplementary question is for the Minister for International Trade. Yesterday, the Prime Minister claimed that he had done everything to settle the matter of article XI of GATT. Following the latest negotiations on the Dunkel report in