

Oral Questions

When the levels of poverty are at record highs in Canada, why is this government wasting time on new definitions rather than taking immediate measures to eliminate poverty in this country?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, we have not changed the definition of poverty. We have coped with the problem of children and poverty in this country.

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the same minister.

Currently there are over 70,000 people in Winnipeg living on either unemployment insurance or social assistance. By any definition those people are poor.

Why is the government spending time on questions of definition of poverty when the real task of the government is to find jobs, to find training and to finally put together a development plan for Winnipeg?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I just answered that question to the other hon. member, who incidentally is also from Winnipeg.

I will repeat what I said. We have not changed the definition of poverty. As I said before, putting \$3 billion for children last year in the Minister of Finance's budget is evidence that we are doing what we can for unemployment and poor children. That should be done first and foremost. The government is trying to give jobs and give opportunities to people to feed their children.

The hon. member knows very well that this will not come like the rain in the morning. It will come with efforts we do and will continue to do.

Once again that party's record was worse when it was in government. The hon. member was not there, but he should listen to his friends who were.

* * *

TRADE

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Trade and it deals with the North American free trade agreement legislation which I understand he intends to introduce today.

The plant in Ingersoll which manufactures truck trailers has announced that it is shutting down permanently with a loss of 240 jobs. This is the fourth shut-down in this industry since free trade came into effect losing 1,300 jobs as all of its production has been shifted to the United States.

I want to ask how this government can push ahead with extending free trade to include Mexico when the present deal has wiped out entire industries like this one involving the Ingersoll plant.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, maybe my hon. friend could explain to me why it is that under the free trade agreement with the United States, in a period when the nominal growth in the American economy was around 5 per cent, there was a 13.5 per cent increase in exports to the United States market.

Who is exporting those products? Successful companies in the riding of the hon. member and in ridings right across Canada. Yes there are companies that will have some difficulty in a free trade environment, in an environment of globalization, in a recessionary environment. That is a fact of life.

My hon. friend must start to look at the broader picture. If he looks at the broader picture he will see that the market share of Canadian exports into the United States markets has increased significantly. Our exports have increased at double the rate of those exports from Japan to the United States market, of the United Kingdom to the United States, or of Germany to the United States. The sole reason for that is the free trade agreement with the United States.

• (1455)

Mr. Steven W. Langdon (Essex—Windsor): Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada, which this government likes to quote, says that since the free trade deal we have lost manufacturing jobs at a rate three times faster than the United States. That is because of the free trade deal.

There is no question that in this case this entire industry has been hit because of the free trade deal since tariff rates have fallen from 15 per cent to 1.5 per cent.