

Oral Questions

• (1445)

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, clearly the minister is saying there are questions about the NAFTA agreement that are going to be addressed through other agreements.

[Translation]

We have seen the consequences of the free trade agreement, the loss of jobs, the results of deregulation and privatization and the impact of the agreement on economy, but we still have no information on the NAFTA impact studies. My question to the minister is this: Will this government withdraw the bill and let Canadians debate these issues during an election campaign? After all, that is the proper forum for this kind of debate.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Many studies have already been made and most have concluded that NAFTA is the best option for all three countries. As far as the FTA is concerned, last year we saw our exports to the United States increase by more than 13 per cent. These exports created jobs here in Canada.

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[English]

POVERTY

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of health and welfare.

During the reviled reign of this government the number of two parent families with children who must resort to food banks has doubled. Most of these families report going without food at least once a month. Yet according to the chair of the kangaroo committee on poverty, children would have to be naked, homeless or on the brink of starvation before being considered poor.

I ask the minister if poor Canadians will remain fiscal outcasts until this government is cast out.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am trying to deal with the substance of the question. I believe that when the member talks about children we have to be very sensitive. She knows very well that child poverty is not

acceptable but it is a reality and we are trying to deal with that.

In 1992 just for families and children we spent more than \$3 billion and particularly at the child tax benefit level we have improved the situation for the low income workers. We have done the best we can in terms of the many problems facing families today.

Obviously we can always do more but it has to be done with regard to the capacity we have to do it. I believe just in terms of the money itself, \$3 billion for one year is probably the most that any government has done in this country.

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Mr. Speaker, the government cannot hide the plight of the poor with a sleight of the hand.

The substance of my question is that nearly two million Canadians, 600,000 of them children, will need the help of food banks to survive this last year of Tory caucus curse. Members of that caucus want to write off poverty stricken Canadians as bourgeois free-loaders who are not poor at all.

I ask the minister to explain why the basic instinct of this government is to leave poor Canadians with nothing but fried green tomatoes.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, it is increasingly difficult to find the substance but I am going to try again. I have said what this government has done in terms of addressing child poverty.

• (1450)

I remember when her party was in power in 1975, 1980 or 1982. There were poor children in Canada and proportionally it was not necessarily better than it is today.

The problem with the hon. member's party is that it is good on the opposition side of the House but when it is on this side, it is bad on social policies and worse, it is also bad on economic policies.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

This whole idea of changing the definition of poverty rather than taking the necessary actions to reduce poverty is the most ridiculous idea I have ever heard.