

hunger is an incentive. Will he please tell us why his government is not prepared to help these children?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to provide my hon. friend with a fact. My hon. friend refers to this as a growth industry. If that were the case, obviously that would be very, very troubling. Any increase of itself is worrying. My friend should know that there were 576,000 fewer low income Canadians in 1990 than in 1984 and 123,000 fewer low income children. The country has made some very substantial progress. The numbers are going the right way although obviously during the recession we have been knocked back again.

I point out to my hon. friend that we have made very substantial progress in these areas, particularly in respect of children, and we continue to devote the energies and the interests of the government toward that end.

Witness, for example, the decision of the minister of health to focus more and more of the government's resources on children at risk and children in poverty, as announced by the Minister of Finance in the last budget. That I think is an important contribution toward social justice and fairness in Canada.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Prime Minister's response, but the fact of the matter is that his government has now categorized poor children into the deserving poor and the undeserving poor. That is the direction of his government. We now have 700,000 hungry children in line-ups at food banks. That is the record of his government.

I want to ask the Prime Minister this. They have a half million dollars advertising campaign in Canadian papers.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Would the hon. member put her question, please?

Ms. Black: Madam Speaker, my question for the Prime Minister is this. Why is his government advertising to the tune of half a million dollars with ads saying their new benefits are new, they are simpler, they are fairer? They sound like an advertisement for a new detergent. Why are they wasting half a million dollars on ad campaigns instead of feeding the hungry in this country?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, we of course have done no such thing. Nor do we take any joy at all in any disparities that emerge in our society, particularly as they impact children.

I have already indicated to my hon. friend and the statistics are there—she may want to examine them—that Canada has made very considerable progress.

I point out an analysis that one of our leading journalists did that may interest her and put it in some perspective: "The result is there is a substantial difference between the 1961 and the 1991 definitions of poverty. In 1961 StatsCan classified as low income any family of three with an annual income of less than \$3,000. By our calculations \$3,000 in 1961 dollars is equivalent to \$14,969 in 1990. Yet the StatsCan low income cut-off for a family of three living in a big city in 1990 was \$24,255. The poverty line for a three person household developed by the Canadian Council on Social Development was \$25,000".

An hon. member: Time.

An hon. member: Order.

Mr. Mulroney: What I am saying to my hon. friend is that both in relative terms and in real terms the numbers of working poor and the numbers of children under the poverty line have diminished, even though the poverty line has increased and that the—

Some hon. members: Order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Somehow long preambles bring long answers.

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NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Etobicoke North): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister has just referred to a confidential briefing for two opposition MPs on the North American free trade agreement. Last year the all-party committee on external affairs and international trade stated categorically: "It is critically important that the Canadian people be kept regularly and fully informed about the course and the substance of the government's trade negotiations with Mexico and the United States".