

*Oral Questions**[English]*

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

The sad reality in consequence of this government's economic policy is that the only growth has been in the number of poor in this country.

Today Campaign 2000 announced that this year it is expected that 900,000 children in this country will be on social assistance. This is a 200,000 increase in numbers since the 1988 election.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister: How can this government defend its economic policy when so many families have been left in poverty?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I can just repeat in English what I said in French. In the last year, in light of the economic reality we face, the Government of Canada put out \$3 billion for the children of Canada. Of course if we had the capacity to put up more we would, but we have to consider, as he said, the economic reality. A government such as ours which is able under these circumstances to put up that much money for poor children and children at risk should be commended by the member.

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister knows full well that the problem of poverty is being created by his government's policies, that in fact the distribution of income between the rich and the poor is much worse since this government took power. There is now an unemployment rate of 30 per cent among families in poverty and 60 per cent in single parent families. When is this government going to present to the Canadian people an economic policy which will deal with this issue?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said yesterday, in due course the government will make those announcements.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member has put his question and the minister is responding. I am sure the House will give the minister the courtesy to complete his answer.

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Once again, we are talking about poverty with children, families and so on. I listened to his question and I believe he should listen to the answer. It is fundamental to understand that in light of the realities we face. One of my friends said that we invented it. If we invented poverty for children, it was certainly not here in 1975 and 1981-82. Poverty is a fact of any society and as a government, as would any government in the world, we are trying to deal with that, but as a responsible government we have to take into account all our realities.

Once again, this government gave \$3 billion to poor people and particularly to the children in this country. We also put \$15 billion a year into different departments for children. It is not enough. It is never enough for the children of Canada. But it is what we have the capacity to do, and it is what we will continue to do.

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POVERTY

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, the issue of child poverty in this country and poverty which is increasing is, I am sure, of concern to every Canadian because we are really talking about the future of Canada and the ability and investment in the future of Canada. With one in six children living in poverty, as the child poverty action group has said today, we have to realize that of course poor children have poor parents.

I would like to address my question to the Prime Minister. Last night the Prime Minister spoke of modernizing our social programs. Surely one of the best modern social programs would be to have a goal of full employment and economic policies which would address that goal. The Prime Minister was willing to commit to a goal of full employment in the recent constitutional document. I would like to ask him if he is willing to commit again today and to commit his government to pursue that goal of full employment and the policies that flow from that.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the policies that we pursue are designed to increase employment and to eliminate to the extent humanly possible the problem of unemployment. It is a problem that affects all industrialized societies and it causes great damage to the social fabric of any nation. It causes great disappointment to families and it diminishes opportunities for our young people.