

Oral Questions

I am asking about the Prime Minister's commitment to aboriginal issues, to ensure that they are addressed in a companion resolution that may come out of a First Ministers' meeting.

I am asking for the Prime Minister's commitment that the recommendation on new provincehood for the Yukon and the Territories, in other words the pre-1982 arrangement, will be part of the companion resolution.

Will the Prime Minister invite the leaders of the government of the Northwest Territories and the premier of the Yukon to this First Ministers' Conference?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, may I say with respect that it is precisely this kind of attitude, these kinds of questions, that have given rise to some of the difficulties that the Meech Lake Accord and the process have sustained over the past number of years. We have to presume some good faith on behalf of the other.

The hon. member asks about my attitude and the attitude of my government in respect to aboriginal questions.

Ms. McLaughlin: Your commitment, not your attitude.

Mr. Mulroney: She asks for a commitment. Had she been in the House in 1984 and 1985 I think the member would have been pleased with the manner in which the federal government chaired that aboriginal conference with a view to seeking justice for aboriginal peoples.

If she needs a more recent indication of my commitment and the commitment of my government to that kind of justice, she has only to look at the land claim settlements that we have made in the Northwest Territories, which are the most important and the most generous in the history of Canada in favour of our aboriginal peoples.

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SOCIAL PROGRAMS

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister in the absence of the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Catherine Graham, editor of the Carleton University report entitled *How Ottawa Spends*, writes that despite the Prime Minister's commitments to the contrary, universal child benefits have effectively disappeared without public debate and that the economically disadvantaged in the country are in tough times. She states that it is a case of the have-nots continuing to do without for the sake of the haves.

Will the Prime Minister come clean with this House and admit that the Tory answer to fiscal responsibility is to target existing social programs?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I have not had a chance to read the report to which my hon. friend refers. If she is characterizing it fairly, then it is pretty silly stuff.

The fact of the matter is that since this government was sworn in in 1984, 757,000 Canadians have been removed from the poverty rolls. That includes 229,000 women and 259,000 children.

Apart from that, the best, most important social policy statement in many cases is a job. This government has proceeded with the creation of 1.6 million new jobs in five and a half years, 85 per cent of them full-time and 60 per cent of them going to women.

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister does himself a disservice with that answer.

Perhaps I should remind the Prime Minister that according to Statistics Canada there are over 3.3 million Canadians living below the poverty line.

In these days of high interest rates and a declining economy, how can the Prime Minister justify his policies of ending universality of social programs and introducing unemployment insurance legislation that hits directly at the disadvantaged? What is he going to say to these 3.3 million Canadians?

Mr. Peterson: Let them eat cake.

Mr. Dick: That's the Liberal way.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, after striking out, the impoverished member from Willowdale returns for a discussion on poverty.