

Oral Questions

The next thing we saw, and showing disrespect for this Parliament, the Prime Minister went out and made the announcement of his economic plan to a fund raising dinner at \$500 a plate, neglecting to make that statement here in the House of Commons.

The Prime Minister announced a plan that was no plan at all because it will take its course. I would like to say to the Prime Minister that Campaign 2000, in a report on child poverty, said that one out of six children in Canada lives in poverty; that internationally we look terrible. It is shameful. The U.K., France, Holland, Germany and many others are ahead of us. We are barely above the United States. Everyone in this country knows that the best way to give pride and dignity to these children is to ensure that their parents have work in Canada.

I want to ask the Prime Minister if he will have a program soon to make sure that the fathers and mothers of these children will have some work so that they can give bread and dignity to their children.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised the Leader of the Opposition failed to mention important measures the government has taken, especially this year, aimed at Canada's children.

Since the beginning of 1982, the government has invested around \$3 billion, which includes the child tax benefit and the \$500 million earmarked for children at risk, plus a number of projects concerning drugs and the environment, probably the largest amount of money invested by a Canadian government in the kind of situation we have today.

I believe that child poverty is something Canadians should never condone and that it will require a commensurate effort on the part of all governments and all Canadians.

I believe that considering the economic situation, to which he himself referred, the Leader of the Opposition should remember that what the government has done for Canada's children was done responsibly as part of our responsibility for managing the affairs of this country.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we had a debate in this House and the problem was examined by a committee, but none of the experts supported the government's point of view. The government has introduced a program that will give cheques to children during the first six months of the 1993 election year, but subsequently they will lose those benefits. Two years from now, they will be even worse off than they are today.

Instead of introducing these election gimmicks, could the minister perhaps talk to his colleagues and tell them that the best way to give these children some dignity and support is to ensure that their parents have jobs?

• (1420)

When will the government take the advice of the opposition, now supported by the New Democratic Party and even by the Bloc Québécois, and introduce a program to finance infrastructures, with one third paid by the provinces, one third by the municipalities and one third by the federal government? This would put hundreds of people to work immediately.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said that giving an additional \$500 to every low-income family in Canada, especially those earning \$10,000 or more, was a political ploy and an election gimmick. I think that calling any assistance we give to children an election gimmick reflects a lack of class and an outlook that is absolutely deplorable.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, when the minister appeared before the committee, he met the experts and everyone agreed that this was not a solution, or should I say it was a purely political solution to try and win votes—which they will not get in any event—during the first six months of 1993.

Is the minister prepared to go back and set up a long term program instead of this vote-winning gimmick?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. The Leader of the Opposition may be concerned about the election, but I am concerned about the future of our children.