

Oral Questions

We have addressed a package in the budget to those low income workers who do not benefit from the package of benefits given to those who are social recipients. The member knows that very well.

This program covers things like transportation, school and many other costs that are paid to social beneficiaries and not to those we are targeting.

That is the answer and he knows that very well.

I just want him to tell Canadians, as I do, that we are doing the best we can. We will continue to do that, but with the help of all Canadians maybe some day the food banks will all disappear.

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

The minister has happily defended the fact that the government is trying its best. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of Canadians are affected each month by their inability to feed themselves. Since this government took office the number of food banks has risen from 1 to 292.

Does this government not realize that people prefer to work than to stand in line for their daily bread and butter? What are the civic measures this government is willing to present to Canadians to combat the lack of food for so many hundreds of thousands of families across this country?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, in the package that we will be presenting soon, we will try to deal more specifically with the children at risk in many different ways.

What we are calling for today, and I am sure the member will agree with it, is that all volunteers in this country, organizations and NGOs, the provinces, the municipalities, the federal level, put all their energies and resources together to help the most Canadians we can to avoid the cruel reality the hon. member is talking about. He knows very well that we must have all levels of government involved. However, it is not possible to do something if we do not improve the economy of this country in a way that it will provide the resources that we can give to Canadians.

This is the simple position that I have. Once again I am ready to work with all Canadians to do that.

NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Minister for International Trade or his substitute a question surrounding the government's secrecy and fear over the negotiations on the North American free trade agreement.

The Mexican Senate has had a lengthy briefing on the draft bracketed agreement. The U.S. Congress has had a briefing and the documents are available to them. Yet this government is suggesting that before we get a briefing, we have to sign a statement of confidentiality that would have even frozen Igor Gouzenko from opening his mouth.

I want to know why is it that this government demands confidentiality and rules on us that are far more strict than those applied to Mexico or the United States. What is it hiding?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, my hon. friend is asking for a briefing on the negotiations.

He has not had the briefing but he is already opposed to it. Maybe if we give him another briefing he will be in favour. The fact of the matter is that this has been widely publicized, as my hon. friend knows. The Secretary of State for External Affairs says there is a formal briefing on Thursday.

My hon. friend spends a lot of his time on the phone to the Mexicans and the Americans. He has lots of friends down there.

Mr. Angus: At least he gets through.

Mr. Brewin: They answer his calls.

Mr. Mulroney: The three parties have matters of substance they wish to resolve. If those questions are resolved, presumably there will be an agreement in principle that my hon. friend will perhaps upon reflection want to vigorously support.

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Madam Speaker, at least I get through on the phone.

I phoned the Mexican Senate. They were thoroughly briefed. They even sent me a report on the document. The U.S. Congress has had a briefing. They are discuss-