

Oral Questions

It is now reported that two thirds of all recipients of food bank services in Atlantic Canada are teenagers or children. What action is this government intending to take to see that children in this country receive adequate assistance and are not dependent on charity and food banks?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I said yesterday and the day before that we all deplore the fact that children particularly have to count on food banks to be fed.

Having said that, I believe the last package of child benefits we put forward, particularly for low-income workers will help and will relieve those families. Maybe it will not be able to do all my friend asks for, but there is a real willingness to do the best we can to relieve those people.

In light of the capacity we have to improve the economy we will be able to put more resources to the services of those people.

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GENERAL MOTORS

Mr. Garth Turner (Halton—Peel): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry, Science and Technology.

To the obvious disappointment of the president of local 222 of the Canadian Auto Workers, General Motors employees in Oshawa voted yesterday to reject a request from the company which would have made that facility more competitive.

Can the minister tell the house how serious he considers this action to be and if he will ask CAW boss Bob White to discuss other ways of maintaining the viability of these 4,000 jobs?

Mr. Speaker: The minister may answer if he wishes, but the question is not directed to the administration of government. It is out of order.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I simply wanted to say that the matter of GM Oshawa and the difficulties it is going through now in terms of the discussions it is having with Detroit on the future of the plant is something that is very, very much a matter of concern to the government.

I have spoken to Mr. Peapples, I have spoken to Bob White and other union leaders in Oshawa. As well, I visited with Mr. Stempel in Detroit.

There is a difference of opinion between the union and the company. I hope that they will be able to resolve this in a way to support the ongoing operations of the company's plant in Oshawa.

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[Translation]

FRANCOPHONES OUTSIDE QUEBEC

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Was the minister stating his government's position when he said, and I quote the Canadian Press here: "Even if they have been asked to, francophones outside Quebec will not take part in the constitutional talks as natives will. There are a million Italians, but they do not ask for anything."

In his statement, the minister makes French Canadians and Acadians feel they are no more than one group among many others. In so doing, he wipes away an historical national policy and renounces linguistic duality. I ask him this: Was he quoted accurately?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as a rule I do not comment on newspaper articles and today is no exception. I think that the House is a great forum and I take this opportunity to reiterate my opinion on that subject.

My position has not changed since the days when I was Secretary of State responsible for the issue of francophones outside Quebec for one year. The federal government is and will continue to be, responsible for the protection of all linguistic minorities in Canada. We have spent a lot of money on this and will continue in the future.

With regard to their participation in the constitutional talks, what I said, was that the number of people they represent does not constitute, in my mind, a criterion on which to decide whether or not a certain group should be represented, but rather that the francophone minority being represented through governments, with the Quebec government representing the francophone majority, while the federal government is responsible for the francophone minority, the representation of native groups is based on their existence as a founding nation.