

Oral Questions

That is substantial growth and all transfer payments, particularly those in the area of equalization and the CAP payments, are increasing at a substantial amount, certainly much more than our over-all annual increase in program expenditures.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that 700,000 young Canadian children have to go to food banks to get something to eat. In one of the richest countries of the world, this is outrageous. In Montreal alone, 95,000 people are on welfare.

My question is directed to the minister. How can the provinces and municipalities be expected to meet their commitments to the poor, when the federal government keeps cutting the total amount of transfer payments to the provinces?

[*English*]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the same answer applies.

I would urge the hon. member to look at the facts. She will find that over all, the average annual rate of growth of transfer payments from 1984-85 to 1992-93 is growing at an average rate of 5.4 per cent. The growth rate from 1991-92 to 1992-93 is 5.1 per cent.

We recognize that this is not the kind of growth rate that you experience during the high inflation days. When you have inflation at 1.6 per cent or 1.7 per cent, an increase in transfer payments at the rate of 5 per cent or 5.5 per cent is very substantial.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, at Toronto City Hall today, they are opening a photo exhibit. It is called "Canada's Food Bank Kids". There are 700,000 of them, including many thousands in that very city who have to exist through food banks.

I want to ask the Acting Prime Minister: Given that his government's policies have forced provincial and local governments to cut back directly and indirectly on services to the poor, how is he meeting his obligation to the United Nations in that great declaration on children when his own federal government continues to take food out of the mouths of Canada's children?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, that is, indeed, an

unfortunate conclusion because the growth in transfer payments to the province of Ontario has been 6.2 per cent over the period 1984-85 to 1992-93.

As a matter of fact, this year there will be something in the order of \$10 billion transferred to the province of Ontario through transfer payments and tax points. When we have an annual increase rate of 6.2 per cent, when our over all program expenditures are being contained to 3.5 to 3.6 per cent, that is a very generous disposition of taxpayers' dollars. I wish the hon. member would look at that and, in difficult times when we are trying to deal with a deficit, treat it for what it is, a very generous contribution by the federal government.

• (1420)

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

The city of Edmonton is now home for four government members of Parliament and 60 food hamper programs.

On March 25 ANAWIM, an inner city agency, served 121 food hampers to help 199 people eat while waiting for their social assistance cheque to come in at the end of the month. This a typical day for this organization in the last week of each month.

Will the minister now admit to the House that the government's economic and social policies are wreaking havoc on his own province?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, of course every jurisdiction, whether it be federal, provincial or municipal, is going through some very severe cost pressures and cost drivers. We are trying to deal with that in a generous fashion while at the same time attempting to bring down the deficit and curtail the growth of the burden of debt which takes money out of the hands of the poorer people and the children of Canada.

I remind the hon. member that if we do not get at the fundamental problems of the deficit and the debt, there will be a lesser amount of money to be provided for children, the working poor and the poverty stricken in this country. What we are trying to do is manage in such a way that we can deal with the fundamentals in a balanced way while at the same time providing the framework and the environment for investment and job opportunities, not only the preservation of existing jobs but the creation of new jobs.