

Oral Questions

Of course, it is a very complex issue which cannot be solved exclusively by programs coming from the federal level. The Leader of the Opposition knows very well that it is a provincial matter, or regionally first. We have to deal with the provinces, but I believe with the help of the provinces and with the resources that we will have at our disposal at the time, we will try to put forward a strategy which will deal the best we can with the problems of the children of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see the minister's good intentions. However, I would remind him that the Montreal Catholic School Commission already has such a program and even in Montreal, children are given their exams early in the month, because at the end of the month, they no longer have the physical strength needed for their school work. I therefore ask the minister to consider these problems, and we will be ready to co-operate with them, so that the children of poor families in Canada can go to school, because these children are our country's future. We must help them train their minds in an appropriate setting so that they can take their rightful place as the next century begins, as the best prepared to face global competition.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I think that the Leader of the Opposition is right to be concerned about the problem of child poverty. I think that everyone deplores that problem, but we must realize that children have many other problems besides poverty.

• (1420)

I believe there are problems of sexual abuse, problems of family violence, problems with street kids. All these problems are or will be considered in the strategy.

I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition that the problem with children also goes beyond the issue of simply being able to deal with the problem of poverty. And I believe that the hon. member is also aware of that.

I would also like to tell the Leader of the Opposition that yesterday we talked about the rights of children and I do not think that today we can discuss the rights of children without also talking about the obligations of

adults. The program or strategy unveiled by the government will also take into account some mechanisms to make Canadian society more aware of the problems of children, which go beyond the problems of poverty.

[*English*]

Mr. David Walker (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the acting Prime Minister and concerns today's report on Poverty.

The report released today on child poverty by government members stressed, and I quote: "The federal government has a role to play in providing an economic training and job creation environment that will provide families with sufficient income to enable them to feed their children".

Will the government now admit to the total failure of its fiscal and family policies? Will it finally turn a new leaf and give Canadian families a break?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I obviously disagree with the question of total failure of policies. Of course there are too many children in Canada who are under the poverty level. At the same time I believe that when we put \$15 billion into all departments of government that we manage, I believe we are doing something. It is never enough. Everybody agrees with that. At the same time, we have to put in more money.

As I said in French before, we have to take into account the the problems of children in Canada. I want to congratulate the committee which did wonderful work in dealing with the question of children and poverty. At the same time, the committee refers to much more than just the question of putting more money into the system. I believe that the money does not speak to the problems children have in Canada.

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

One question which the committee refused to deal with is the question of minimum wage, yet the quickest way to address the needs of some of the poorest families in this country is to increase the federal wage.

When this question was posed in the House over the last two years, the minister repeatedly said that he is studying it.