

Oral Questions

No one has suggested that perfection has been achieved. There are very significant advances and these are being widely acknowledged by the IMF and the OECD.

My hon. friend refers to the commitment of his party and others some 26 years ago. I ask him to reflect on this statement:

[*Translation*]

“Quebec has enough private insurance companies that could probably provide a better service than the government and do so far more cheaply.”

An hon. member: Who said that?

Mr. Mulroney: The Leader of the Opposition's new right hand man, Camil Samson, when he was in the Quebec National Assembly.

[*English*]

Mr. Walker: It's not working.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Prime Minister.

His government has consistently maintained that Canada's hungry really are not hungry and that Canada's poor really are not poor and that all these individuals are nothing more than “freeloaders”.

Given that documented trends now indicate very clearly that significant numbers of middle class families are now falling victim to the ravages of poverty, how can this government possibly defend a stay the course economic agenda when so many working and middle class Canadians are crying out for changes and improvements to their economic realities? When will the Prime Minister stop quoting us studies from Chicago and actually do something for Canadians?

• (1440)

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, because of the structural change within our society over the last few years a lot of people are suffering. This is one reason why over the last few years we have developed many programs. Let me emphasize a few.

One program has to do with the child tax benefit that the finance minister introduced January 1 which is based

on net family income. It is targeted at those really in need.

The *Brighter Futures* program, which is \$500 million, went right to the people who need it, specifically natives and young people. We have drug abuse programs and family violence programs. The family means a great deal to us and it means a great deal to our society in Canada.

Mr. Sergio Marchi (York West): Mr. Speaker, I return to the Prime Minister who seems very content and comfortable with the situation in this country.

[*Translation*]

The number of young Canadian families whose incomes recently fell below the poverty line has almost doubled in the past 10 years. Is this government at all concerned about the fact that the country's future generation is increasingly losing the battle against poverty? How does the Prime Minister and his government intend to reverse this very dangerous trend?

[*English*]

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, neither the Prime Minister nor anyone on this side of the House is comfortable when we have people in poverty.

What we have done specifically is target our programs at those people who are in need. I mentioned two or three of the programs.

Mr. Fontana: You are missing the target by a long shot.

Mrs. Sparrow: I also have to mention the finance minister's budget which was brought down last week. It deliberately exempted transfer payments and assistance to aboriginal people who are very much in need.

We do not give up on the family. In fact that is exactly why the finance minister exempted those, to protect them.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for my friend the hon. Minister of Finance.

We heard today that family incomes on the average have dropped to 1976 levels. The average family now is about \$2,000 poorer than it was about 10 years ago. To top it off, since 1990 the average drop in income per family has been minus 2.6 per cent except for the top 20 per cent at minus 1.2 per cent.