

My question is for the Prime Minister. After finding out what Cree Chief Matthew Coon Come said, did he instruct the Canadian embassy in Washington to set the record straight with the American authorities?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I obtained information from the Canadian embassy in the United States. Mr. Coon Come addressed an audience in a debate in which Quebec and other parts of Canada were represented and what he said was debated. The other side was presented publicly at that time. Since it was a debate, the record was set straight by the people there, who had been invited by a group of academics. So the embassy did not think that it had to intervene. Opinions are expressed everywhere in Canada.

As I said yesterday, people whom I know very well and even see in my riding often say things about me that I do not like. But in a democracy, we have to live with it. I see that Premier Parizeau, who was accused, defended himself. Later the Indian chief said that he did not want to attribute those words to Mr. Parizeau. According to the information I have, he issued a correction.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think that the Prime Minister is minimizing the situation. Keep in mind that in this case a Canadian province and one of Canada's two main language communities are being attacked and accused of a very serious charge of racism. Therefore I think that the Prime Minister should take this matter more seriously.

How does he explain, for example, that the Canadian embassy did not intervene to set the record straight the day after Mr. Coon Come made his remarks, while in the case of clear cutting, for example, the embassy did a very fine job and quite legitimately intervened with the American authorities to correct the information going around Europe on the clear cutting done by Canadian paper companies, and even spent \$4.5 million for this purpose? Why did it not show the same vigilance, since this embassy has just demanded the exclusive right to represent Quebec's interests in Washington?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have just given a very clear explanation. It was a debate. Someone reportedly expressed an opinion that was contradicted by other people who were there. Today, that person says he was misinterpreted and did not want to attack Mr. Parizeau. Mr. Parizeau defended himself. In a democratic society, that is normal.

Expressing an opinion is one thing. When dealing with forests or something else, as the Leader of the Opposition raised this issue in his question—When the Government of Quebec wanted to go ahead with the new James Bay project for hydro-electric power, the Canadian government's representative always defended Quebec's interests against American environmentalists.

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But if a Canadian citizen makes untrue statements about a politician—that has happened to me so often. If the Leader of the Opposition took the initiative to defend me every time nasty things were said about the Prime Minister of Canada in his presence, I would be pleasantly surprised.

• (1420)

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the exaggeration in political discussions when a politician is attacked is one thing, but these discussions must be level-headed and respect people's reputations. Vilifying a whole people is something else. I say to the Prime Minister that as Prime Minister of Canada, if he claims to defend Canada—if Quebec is vilified everywhere and charged with racism, Canada as a whole suffers.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Bouchard: That was the preamble to my question, Mr. Speaker. Are we to understand that the federal government refuses to set the record straight in this serious matter, because in the pre-referendum environment it suits the government to have the image of Quebec and its pro-sovereignty government discredited in the United States?

[English]

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to repeat what I said.

There was a debate in Washington among Canadians invited by a group to debate the situation of Quebec and Canada. The native leader spoke strongly. He claimed today that he did not attribute his words to the premier of Quebec. The premier defended himself today. We have debates like that all the time. The situation was rectified that very moment by the people there. The embassy felt there was nothing to do at the moment because other Canadian citizens had defended the Canadian population and in particular the Quebec population.

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[Translation]

COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL DE SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his report, the Auditor General mentions the lack of thoroughness and the weakness of the data used to justify the closure of military bases. He refers, among other examples, to the base in Portage-La Prairie, Manitoba, where the costs related to the closure were significantly underestimated by the Department of National Defence. In the end, this measure resulted in savings of \$170 million, instead of the anticipated \$411 million.

Is the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs aware that the very same scenario is being repeated with the closure of the military college in Saint-Jean, because he significantly underestimates the costs of transferring the operations to Kingston, and does the minister realize that he will never reach the