● (1420)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, I also wish these young people every success.

[*English*]

Every one of us has enjoyed them. They have worked hard and have learned a lot about Canada in meeting members from across the land.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*Translation*]

THE CONSTITUTION

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister.

Since this is the last day of the session and there is still a great deal of uncertainty about the constitutional future of this country, could the Prime Minister give the House the assurance that any agreement his government will try to conclude will contain two very important components that were supported by this House? I am referring to a strong economic union in Canada and the preservation and promotion of the linguistic duality of our country, two aspects that were emphasized by Parliament and which we absolutely want to see in the constitutional agreement we hope to obtain very shortly.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister Responsible for Constitutional Affairs happens to be working on obtaining these two provisions, among other things. I am referring to the two clauses relating to economic union and linguistic duality, which would in any event be major clauses in any constitutional agreement.

[*English*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Prime Minister on the subject of a strong economic union in Canada. Constitutional negotiation cannot be a one-way street going in the direction of devolution. If we want to face a strong future for all Canada, we need to make sure that the movement of people, goods, capital and services will be protected and enhanced in the new Constitution.

Could the Prime Minister give a clear assurance to the House of Commons that the notion of a strong economic union to strengthen the federation will be part of the negotiations and the results of the negotiations in the days to come?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, we have been seeking to obtain this kind of a clause precisely because of the difficulties my hon. friend has indicated that he encountered himself 10 years ago when we failed to incorporate this kind of clause in the Constitution in 1981–82.

I say that recognizing that my hon. friend tried to have it achieved. Unfortunately it was rejected at that time. We have made some improvements and we are going to try to make certain that the concept of an economic union will be accepted.

Obviously there is something bizarre when there are fewer trade barriers existing in Europe among 12 sovereign countries than there are among 10 Canadian provinces and two territories.

Canadians seem to be all in favour of liberalization of trade outside but not within our own boundaries. It does not make a great deal of sense that a company from Toronto would, for example, have to dig up bricks that were put in a street in the Outaouais, in Hull, because they did not meet certain provincial requirements. This is destructive of productivity. It is destructive of enhancing our competitiveness.

The provinces have to understand themselves. They talk about one Canada. One way they can strengthen one Canada is by lowering trade barriers within Canada.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely with the Prime Minister. It is what we have always said. It would have been more logical to have an economic union within Canada before having one with the United States and Mexico.

In order to achieve this goal that we all share in the House of Commons, I would like to ask the Prime Minister a question. Does he agree with the opposition that if the people of Canada were to be consulted in a national referendum they would tell the premiers and those who oppose a real economic union in Canada that they are wrong, that we need one in Canada and that the best way is to consult the Canadian people in a national referendum?