

*Oral Questions*

Why should Canadians elect and pay for MPs who are totally shackled to their political masters and who are unable to speak for and vote for their constituents wishes?

I tell Canadians not to give up. The Liberals can be thrown out and the Reform Party is ready to make this place work on the democratic principles Canadians expect.

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## ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

• (1415)

[Translation]

### OPERATION UNITY CENTRE

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council took great pains to remove three quarters of a document intended for the Minister of Labour from the public eye. The document, which appears to describe the activities of the operation unity centre, was obtained by the opposition under the Access to Information Act. I say "appears", because the government whited out most of the pages before sending them to the Information Commissioner. Even the table of contents is secret. Mr. Speaker, this is too much.

What lessons in transparency can the Prime Minister offer to the Government of Quebec when he keeps three quarters of a Privy Council document on the activities of the operation unity centre secret?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, under the Access to Information Act, the government makes public what has to be made public. Some of the government's activities are not made public. The Privy Council operates daily in connection with the referendum and the national problem facing the country at the moment.

As you can imagine, it provides the Canadian government with very effective information and advice on keeping the country together.

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Prime Minister what is so secret about the activities of the operation unity centre—the information that appears in the document in question—that it is being turned into a real state secret? What is the government trying to hide from Quebecers? This is the question.

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, ministerial activities and communications in cabinet are privileged. We try to release as much as possible to the press and the public, but some matters of discussion in a government remain privileged between members of the administration. There is nothing cynical in this, particularly because it is an open campaign.

We are very open, and the burden of proof lies with the opposition to say why Quebecers should separate from Canada. All we have to say is that we who are defending Canada are defending more than 125 years of history considered by the world to be a great history of political evolution from a former colony to one of the world's model countries.

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the question is a very simple one: why is the government hiding three quarters of a document on the hottest item at the moment, the Quebec referendum? Since the Prime Minister says the campaign is an open one, I am going to give him the opportunity to show how open it is, since the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs said in February that most of the funds injected into operation unity would go to pay for studies on eliminating overlap.

How then can the Prime Minister justify the fact that the Privy Council has not made public these studies, which were conducted and paid for with public funds?

**Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on May 21, I wrote the chairman of the standing committee of the House of Commons providing him with a complete list of all those working in the unity group, identifying their duties and indicating the amount of the budget.

I also told him then that, so long as the date of the referendum was not known, we could quite likely spend more than the \$2.5 million in the blue book.

Since then, the Parti Québécois has spent more than \$22 million. This figure does not appear in the expenditures of the Quebec government as referendum expenditures.

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will simply repeat the question put by the Leader of the Opposition.

The minister accused another government of keeping studies under wraps, although these studies are published regularly. The problem, and that is the gist of our question, is this. He told us that most operation unity funds would be used for studies of the extremely costly duplication that exists within the Canadian federal system.

• (1420)

Our question is this: If he is so open, what about these studies which absorb most of the funds of this organization? Tell us about them, Mr. Minister.

**Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I indicated at the time that members of the Unity Group had been recruited to prepare analyses of the government's situation, and obviously some of these can be released to the