

The Address

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would urge the member for Papineau—Saint-Michel to be a bit more democratic in the future when he speaks about the Bloc Québécois and about its role as the Official Opposition.

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the member and to remind him that I am not questioning the legitimacy of the Leader of the Opposition in this Parliament. I congratulated him for being elected and bringing with him fifty or so members. What I said is that, once here, he cannot claim that he won strictly on the strength of his separatist platform. In this respect, I quoted his own speech in which he said that he came here because there was a problem with the economy. People voted for him and for BQ candidates not because of their political message but because of the economic situation. What I do not like is for the Leader of the Opposition to claim, as he just did in his remarks, that the referendum debate has started.

• (1745)

If he wants to have a referendum debate here in this House, he might have the opportunity to do so. But above all, what is really important is for him to have a real dialogue on the ins and outs of such a process, and that is what I urge him to do. Bélanger-Campeau did not conduct such an in depth study. I sat on that commission and I saw how those who appeared in front of it and those who were leading the debate were all of the same mind and going in the same direction.

As a matter of fact, all those supposedly non-aligned people are now joining the ranks of the Parti Québécois, starting with Mr. Campeau and his cohorts. We now know that all those who then claimed to be non-aligned were indeed biased.

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member for Papineau—Saint-Michel be so kind as to clear up a point for me? Ever since the Liberal convention when the hon. member for Saint-Maurice became leader of the Liberal Party, it has been quite clear that from then on we would not hear a single word on the Constitution. That policy was confirmed after the demise of the Charlottetown Accord in English-speaking Canada and in Quebec. It was stated again during the election campaign that we would not hear any more about the Constitution. The economy would be the only topic for discussion.

But except for the few civilities that are in order, the Constitution was the only theme of the hon. member's speech. Are we to infer that the Cabinet is divided over this issue and that you are going to vote for the amendment moved by the hon. member for Calgary Southwest and leader of the Reform Party to the effect

that there should be more free votes in this House? I get the impression that you would feel more comfortable that way.

Mr. Ouellet: I welcome the hon. member's response to my comments. He speaks just like all other people in Quebec who resent Quebecers being told they stand to gain from being part of Canada. Each and every time we tell Quebecers there are benefits for them in being part of the Canadian federation, the proponents of Quebec independence always try to delude people into believing that our comments are inappropriate and inconsistent. Mr. Speaker, an enlightened debate on the consequences an independent Quebec would have is certainly in order.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Ouellet: I am delighted to see those members applaud. I am glad they sit in this House because their contacts with other members will help them do away with parochialism, widen their horizons and understand that there is a place in Canada, and a good one at that, for Quebecers who want to be part of this country and be respected in it.

Mr. Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, I seek your guidance. Do I have the floor for a comment or for my speech?

The Deputy Speaker: There are two minutes left in the question and comment period.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu): I will be pleased to use them to say a few words to the hon. minister who has just spoken. He says we do not speak for the men and women of Quebec, I wonder whose interest he has at heart?

When he says that we have benefitted a lot from federalism, he fails to mention that we had to fight the system in order to get what we got. Remember the fight of Jean Lesage. Remember the fight of Mr. Johnson, the real one, Daniel. Remember the fight of Mr. Bertrand—

• (1750)

The Deputy Speaker: The time for questions and comments has now expired. I think that the hon. member for Richelieu is next.

[*English*]

I would like to thank members for not voting against me yesterday when my election was proposed. I have not worn this gown for 15 years; I am glad to see that it still fits. I want you to know that to get anywhere here you need to have names like my colleague's and mine.

[*Translation*]

More seriously, I will no doubt make mistakes over the weeks and months to come that will entail some problems and I would like to ask members from all sides to be patient.

The hon. member for Richelieu has the floor.