

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Prime Minister. I have done it for a long time in my life. I intend to keep doing it.

The gap between those who proclaim and those who talk about sovereignty—they never use the word independence and separation—is narrowing. When will he do what a Prime Minister should do, tell his ministers from Quebec, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of National Health and Welfare to do what is required of ministers of the Crown, to go to Quebec and tell them what the Prime Minister just said to this House and not chicken out in front of these two ministers who are afraid to take their responsibilities.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, perhaps my hon. friend should be a little more discriminating in the people he seeks to reject. I do not have it with me, but I can remember that just about Christmas time last year, the Minister of National Health and Welfare on the *The Journal* during a profile of him made a statement which was as moving and as poignant in favour of Canada that anyone would ever want to hear. My hon. friend should support and applaud that.

Let us just take a second. On two occasions the Minister of National Health and Welfare stood as a federal candidate in elections on behalf of a federal party seeking to improve Canada. In 1980 the Minister of National Health and Welfare was one of those who voted on the other side. What he is learning and what he is in the process of appreciating is the magnificence of a larger vision, of a greater Canada.

If we just say to those who voted in 1980 on the other side: "Be gone. We don't want to have anything to do with you and we are going to establish your degree of patriotism", I would suggest to my hon. friend that what we should be doing is reaching out as we have been.

I can tell my hon. friend that the statements that the Minister of National Health and Welfare has been making have been most supportive of Canada. He remains a strong believer in a powerful Quebec within a strong and united Canada. I believe we should encourage all of the Quebecers and all Canadians to support what we believe is in the best interest of all Quebecers

and Canadians, namely that which has brought us prosperity and unity and strength for 125 years—Canada.

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. It follows up the questions that the Leader of the Opposition just asked about this uncertainty which seems to prevail among some of his ministers from Quebec.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister whether cabinet has taken a clear and definite position on the constitutional offers that will be made.

On reading this morning's newspapers, it seems that two Quebec ministers still do not know what the Canadian government intends to propose to solve the constitutional crisis and in particular to give Quebec what the government of that province has been demanding for quite some time.

Can the Prime Minister tell us today whether the government has made progress in that regard or is it still completely in a fog and does not know what to offer Quebecers to solve the constitutional crisis?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my friend knows very well that we inherited a complicated situation. We inherited a situation where Quebec did not endorse the Canadian Constitution in 1981-82. We also inherited an amending formula that requires the presence and approval of the premiers.

It is not only the position of the Canadian government or Parliament that counts, but now the provincial premiers as well. In the past, they were not always inclined to support openly Quebec's traditional or historic demands. Some of them are less "hot" on Quebec's position. I think that at least one of them belongs to my friend's party; perhaps he could talk to him about it at an appropriate time.

As far as the ministers are concerned, there is no uncertainty about the fundamental commitment to a united Canada and a strong, modern, dynamic Quebec within a renewed federation, and all ministers without exception support the positions that I set forth as Prime Minister of Canada and which I defended in favour of Canada.