

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want this Quebec referendum to be decisive and conclusive. They do not want any confusion or ambiguity concerning the meaning of the vote, before or after.

Yet the Leader of the Opposition clouds the issue when he says that he is prepared to accept a yes vote as binding and conclusive but not a no vote, and the Prime Minister does not help things when he implies that he is prepared to accept a no vote as binding and conclusive but waffles on the meaning of a yes vote.

For the benefit of all Canadians including Quebecers who want clarity and certainty in interpreting the Quebec referendum, will the Prime Minister make clear that a yes vote means Quebec is on its way out, that a no vote means Quebec is in the federation for the long haul, and that 50 per cent plus one is the dividing line between those two positions?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we had a clear question. They are asking the people of Canada: Do you want sovereignty? At the same time they say they want to stay in Canada.

Last week *The Economist* had the title "They want a divorce today and they want to be lovers tomorrow". It is not a very clear question. I have been asking them for a long time in this House of Commons to give us a real question, an honest, clear question on separation. They have clouded the issue talking about divorce and remarriage at the same time. They want me on behalf of all Canadians to say that with a clouded question like that with one vote I will help them to destroy Canada. You might, I will not, Mr. Manning.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: I would ask all hon. members to please direct their remarks to the Chair.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple supplementary in response to the Prime Minister's reply. If the question asked in the Quebec referendum is not clear and is ambiguous, is he prepared to ensure a clear question is put to Quebecers?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there will be a clear answer by Quebecers on the 30th of October. They will say they will stay in Canada so the question is purely hypothetical.

The Speaker: Colleagues, the questions today have bordered on the hypothetical. I would ask all hon. members in phrasing the questions to please pay strict attention to the fact that they be questions which deal with policy matters of the government as opposed to hypothetical questions. I would ask you to do that.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I find the Prime Minister's answer adding to the ambiguity which as I said at the beginning Canadians do not want. He just said that the question was unclear and therefore the answer would be ambiguous. Then he said that the response to that question would be a clear answer.

The majority of the members of this House believe that a yes vote in the referendum means the separation of Quebec and an end to its participation in the Canadian union. The separatist members can talk about a new marriage or partnership but it will be a partnership without a partner, a marriage without a spouse and Quebec will find itself at home alone.

Will the Prime Minister therefore state unequivocally that a 50 per cent plus one yes in the referendum will mean, sadly, an end to Quebec's position in Canada and not a new and better union?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, very often when the PQ and the Bloc Québécois say that they will all have an economic and political union, that they will have a passport, citizenship, that they will have the same currency and so on, they are not being very frank with the people of Quebec. That would be decided by the rest of Canada if it were to be the case.

• (1435)

But why waste our time? We have so many other problems facing this nation. Six weeks from today the people of Quebec, the people who were here, who opened up this country, when the francophones of this land left the Saint-Maurice valley to open the prairies, do we think these people will want to let go of the best country in the world? They will not.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, you should have the rules of the House respected. Hypothetical questions are not permitted in this situation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. In his autobiography, *Dans la fosse aux lions*, published in 1985, our current Prime Minister, undertook to abide by the decision made by Quebecers, saying that his party was betting on democracy. That they would convince that they should remain in Canada and would win. If they lost, they would respect Quebecers' wish and accept separation.