

Oral Questions

• (1415)

[Translation]

LEADER OF ACTION DÉMOCRATIQUE DU QUÉBEC

Mr. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Parti Action Démocratique in Quebec had announced that his party would participate in the regional commissions by saying, and I quote: "We can only rejoice over the fact that our conditions have been agreed to. We are happy to contribute to an improvement of the process. We are taking a constructive approach. We hope that many people will take part in the consultation".

Three months later, he said and I quote: "I think that it is not necessarily clear in the minds of all the citizens who came to participate, because if they had been told at the beginning of the consultation that they were wasting their time and that everything had been decided in advance, there might not have been 55,000 participants". The leader of the Parti Action Démocratique is experiencing a rude political awakening. He has realized, but too late, that he has been manipulated by the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois.

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[English]

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Essex—Kent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was amazed to read in the Toronto *Star* that Ontario Tories are turning to the want ads to find candidates to run in this year's provincial election. The add which ran in at least three Ontario newspapers is seeking Conservatives with common sense.

Over the past several months Mike Harris has been touring Ontario, promising to cut personal income tax by 30 per cent, promising to bring a balanced budget in four years and not to touch policing, education or health care. Everyone knows with any common sense that the numbers do not add up.

Mark Mullins, Harris' chief number cruncher, stated: "I'm not a member of the Conservative Party. The last thing I need is for anyone to say here is the guru behind the package".

Is it possible that Mike Harris' policies are so far out that not even Conservatives with common sense can support them?

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

QUEBEC SOVEREIGNTY

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday at a forum in Toronto hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute and attended by the chairman of Quebec's No committee, Michel Bélanger, one of the Prime Minister's constitutional advisors, Stéphane Dion, said that the worse the economic situation gets, the more Quebecers will change their minds and reject sovereignty.

My question is for the Prime Minister. How can the Prime Minister let one of his constitutional advisors, namely Stéphane Dion, say that the more it hurts, the less support there will be for sovereignty?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Dion is not a constitutional advisor. Furthermore, as everyone knows, I do not spend a lot of time discussing the constitution these days. I am trying to address the economic problems in Canada and Quebec.

I got elected by telling people that I did not want to talk about the constitution. I certainly do not have a constitutional advisor; I do not want to talk about it. I read in the newspaper that he wants to give the Privy Council advice on other things. Personally, I hope that the question will be asked clearly and very soon so that we can stop talking about this and deal with the real problems affecting the population.

I read this article that speculates on what I should do if the Yes side wins in Quebec. We do not even know when the referendum will be held or what the question will be. I am confident that they will lose, so I will not waste my time talking about this.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is surprising, to say the least, that the Prime Minister, who claims not to be interested in constitutional issues, allocated an additional \$7 million or so to his own office so it could set up an operational unit to talk about the constitution during the Quebec referendum.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gauthier: As a preamble to my second question, I will simply remind him that Stéphane Dion is still under contract to his office until March 31. I hope that he at least knows what is going on in his own office.

How can the Prime Minister reconcile the comments made by his advisor, Stéphane Dion, with his own statement that he would respect Quebecers' democratic decision on their political future?