

Oral Questions

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite the Prime Minister's referendum commitments to decentralize the federal apparatus, the Minister of Finance yesterday rejected out of hand the request of the government of Quebec that it transfer the tax resources that the federal government invests in health, social assistance and post-secondary education.

• (1425)

Since he is renegeing on his referendum commitments on decentralization, will the Prime Minister acknowledge that his government's hard-line approach to Quebec is a return to the tried and true formula to slow his decline in popularity with English Canada, which is to put Quebec in its place?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the formula is a very old one. Transfer payments used to be simply cash payments. We subsequently gave a number of tax points. It is very important we continue to make visible transfers like these so that the people in all the provinces will see that the federal government helps pay for the social programs the provincial governments manage.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in view of the Minister of Finance's attitude toward the legitimate request by the Government of Quebec, will the Prime Minister acknowledge that his referendum commitments to decentralize were nothing more than window dressing and the only decentralization he foresees involves sending the bills to the provinces?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said very clearly that we have withdrawn from job training. As for the bills, I have to say, and I already made it quite clear earlier, that the amount of transfers the federal government makes to the provincial governments receiving equalization payments has not decreased in the past three years. Some of the cash transfers for programs were cut, but equalization payments were increased. In the case of Quebec, the amount was over \$11 billion when we formed the government. It remains unchanged today and, as far as I know, it will remain unchanged next year.

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[English]

QUEBEC REFERENDUM

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister was unable or unwilling to answer a simple question. The question was: How does the Prime Minister propose to use the federal power of peace, order and good government to ensure a fair and clear question in the next Quebec referendum.

Now the Prime Minister has had another 24 hours to reflect. The Deputy Prime Minister has whispered in his ear. He has had a chance to consult his legal advisers and the answer is probably on the front page of his briefing notes.

In the interest of national unity, will the Prime Minister now give an answer? How does the Prime Minister propose to use the federal power of peace, order and good government to ensure a fair and clear question in the next Quebec referendum?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not have to read my notes. The leader of the third party should just read yesterday's *Hansard*.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, a clear answer appears to be beyond the capacity of the Prime Minister.

After the last referendum Canadians demanded change and some new ideas for national unity. Reformers responded to that call by putting forward proposals for changes in the federation and terms and conditions for dealing with separation.

The Prime Minister, on the other hand, has borrowed from Brian Mulroney's distinct society clause, gone back to a 1971 veto proposal and gone back to an 1867 clause in order to deal with the referendum.

• (1430)

Where are the new ideas, the imagination and leadership needed to keep this country together? How will distinct society, constitutional vetoes and vague references to peace, order and good government ever convince Quebecers to vote for Canada in the next referendum?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people of Quebec have voted twice to stay in Canada. We should remember that. The leader of the Reform Party seems to be very disappointed that they have chosen Canada but that is not my case. When the Leader of the Opposition tried to teach us some lessons he should know the ridiculous move he made.

I guess the party was too long yesterday. The leader of the third party does not know that 52 members of Parliament is nothing compared to 177 on this side of the House.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister is doing on the national unity front makes Brian Mulroney look good, and you have to go a long way to make Brian Mulroney look good.

The Prime Minister has cobbled together a national unity package without consulting the nation, without consulting the premiers, without consulting his own caucus and without even submitting it to parliamentary debate. He even uses closure, the most undemocratic tool of all to push parts of a national unity package through the national Parliament.