

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

• (1435)

The Speaker: I should tell members we are going to shorten the questions and I am going to help you.

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[Translation]

QUEBEC CULTURE

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister explained that there was no Quebec culture, but rather an English-Canadian and a French-Canadian culture. Last week, however, the Prime Minister tabled in this House a motion saying that one of the characteristics of Quebec's distinct society is its unique culture.

How can the Prime Minister reconcile the comments he made yesterday with his distinct society motion, when there is an obvious contradiction?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never said yesterday that there was no Quebec culture. I said that Quebec culture is not necessarily limited to French, and that French culture also exists outside Quebec.

We believe so strongly in a Quebec culture that not only do we talk about it but we also tabled in the House a motion recognizing it. The hon. member for Rimouski—Témiscouata is voting against our distinct society proposal stating that Quebec is a distinct society by virtue of its French language, unique culture and civil code. This is a motion I tabled in this House to recognize Quebec culture, and Bloc members are voting against it.

I also explained that French culture is celebrated in all of Canada, and I named a number of prominent Canadians of whom francophones in both Quebec and Canada can be proud. I talked about Antonine Maillet, Gabrielle Roy, Roch Voisine, Henri Bergeron, and many others who speak French and have a French culture, even though not all of them are from Quebec. That is what the hon. member does not understand.

If she wants to recognize Quebec's unique culture, all she has to do is to support the motion that will be voted on next Monday in this House.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, frankly, it sounds like there is a Quebec culture on some days but not on others. I would like to know if Quebec culture exists on odd- or even-numbered days. We are stumbling about in the dark.

Does the obvious contradiction between the Prime Minister's comments and his motion not confirm that his motion is in fact a meaningless, empty shell that will not fool Quebecers?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian House of Commons is voting in favour of a motion clearly stating that Quebec is a distinct society by virtue of its French language, culture and civil code. It is the best way of putting it. And yet Bloc members are set to vote against it—because they will rise one by one in this House to vote and be recorded as saying that they do not want to support recognition of Quebec as a distinct society. They should be ashamed of themselves.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, obviously the Minister of Finance does not understand. The whole point of this exercise of eliminating the deficit and the debt is to lead the way toward social programs that we can sustain over the long run and also give people tax relief. That may be hard to understand if you do not pay taxes in this country, but that is what we are aiming for.

Why does the minister insist on prolonging the suffering of Canadians and denying them hope? Why does he do that with this narrow, inch at a time deficit elimination policy? Why does he refuse to completely eliminate the deficit and reduce taxes? Why does he not do his job?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because I have seen the alternative.

I would ask the members of the Reform Party to take a look at the consequences of their own budget. It is impossible for the Reformers to say that what they want to do is protect old age pensions by reducing the deficit, when their means of getting there are to virtually eliminate the basic foundation for old age pensions.

• (1440)

It is impossible for the Reform Party to say that it wants to protect health care when it would erase the transfers that go to protect health care. It is impossible for the Reform Party to say that it wants to reduce taxes when it would pursue an industrial policy that would make it impossible for the country to create jobs.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, that is absolute rubbish. The fact is interest payments on the debt are undercutting social programs, which is exactly why the government is cutting unemployment insurance and making all kinds of other adjustments.