

Oral Questions

Quebec Government based their referendum strategy on the right of peoples to determine their own future in a peaceful and democratic manner. I want to ask the Prime Minister whether he recognizes the right of Quebecers to do so.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask me about the legal aspect, he already has an answer from the Quebec courts, and I am not going to get involved in that, but I can answer his question. When the Leader of the Opposition says that the right to self-determination does not apply to aboriginal people in Quebec, he is contradicting himself. So if he wants to have that kind of debate, we can have one.

As far as I am concerned, I simply want to say that I am surprised at the attitude taken by the opposition, which is hiding things from the people. They did not want to ask an honest question. The Leader of the Opposition told the Americans: "I am a separatist" and when he is in Quebec, he is afraid to say he is a separatist. As for what is happening in Quebec right now, when his own economist, Mr. Mathews, prepared honest studies, the leader of the government, the leader of the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Parizeau, said he was incompetent. Does the Leader of the Opposition agree with Mr. Parizeau that his own economist is not competent?

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it will be noted that the Prime Minister is carefully trying to avoid answering questions on the recognition of the right of Quebecers to make decisions on their own future. He is also creating confusion by censuring his minister responsible for the referendum in Quebec because she made the terrible mistake of saying frankly that the government should respect the wishes democratically expressed by Quebecers.

My question to the Prime Minister is very clear and simple, and I want an answer. Given the important consequences for all the people in Quebec and in the rest of Canada, can the Prime Minister tell us clearly whether or not he will respect the choice expressed by Quebecers in the upcoming referendum?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the opposition to tell the government that they will respect a no vote. We won the referendum in 1980 but they did not respect the wishes of Quebecers.

They are doing the same thing again today. The Leader of the Opposition says that he does not want the no side to win and that he would not regard a no vote as final. When will he stop playing with the future of the people, who want their governments to deal with the real problems, look after their interests, create jobs and provide sound public administration. That is what the people want and what the opposition refuses to do.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

• (1425)

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, they have very short memories. Quebec sovereignists have always respected the results of the 1980 referendum, as shown by the fact that, 15 years later, we are still in Canada discussing the Constitution because two things have occurred since the referendum. The situation has changed, Mr. Speaker. He unilaterally repatriated the Constitution—

Some hon. members: Yes. Yes.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gauthier: —and he killed the Meech Lake accord. He is the one who is creating problems.

Some hon. members: Yes. Yes.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, to the man who said in 1980 that no meant yes and that yes meant no, I ask the following question, and we would like an answer.

Does the Prime Minister of Canada realize that by refusing to admit that he will respect the results of the democratic referendum to be held in Quebec, he is contradicting the chairman of the No committee and his boss in this case, Daniel Johnson from Quebec, as well as his minister responsible for constitutional matters and the referendum in Quebec? Does he realize that his irresponsibility is creating uncertainty and that he is duty-bound to give real answers?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can Quebec separatists talk to me about the Meech Lake accord when they were against it? They were against it, and so too was Parizeau.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): And you stabbed in the back.—Yes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Although the Leader of the Opposition was not present at the end of the Meech Lake debate, he claims that it was a humiliation for Quebecers. They claim in their propaganda that the rejection of the Charlottetown accord in a referendum was a humiliation for Quebecers. Yet, they all voted against it. They helped humiliate Quebecers by voting against the accord.

I reiterate to the opposition that only 3 per cent of Quebecers see the Constitution and the referendum as priorities. The remaining Quebecers want their parliamentarians to deal with the real problems such as job creation, social justice and Canada's place in the world. They want us to deal with the real problems and, on October 30, Quebecers will say clearly to the separatists that they want to remain in the best country in the world, Canada.