

Oral Questions

the fundamental rights without destroying the Constitution in consequence.

The argument that my hon. friend is making is extremely illogical, inconsistent with everything he said. In fact, the provisions clearly strengthen the economic union of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants Canada to become an economic union, but when we look at the document he tabled today, the federal government will have less power than the European Community in Brussels. I want to ask the Prime Minister once again: How can he say we will have an economic union in this country when three provinces and a majority of Canadians can opt out of this union?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I beg to differ with what the Leader of the Official Opposition said about Brussels. The two situations are not identical. We must compare them objectively, and we are prepared to do so before the parliamentary committee.

What the document tabled this morning proposes to do is to eliminate the barriers that exist across Canada and make this country an economic union to be reckoned with, by removing as much as possible any obstacles to domestic trade.

This is one of the proposals the Government of Canada will submit to the members of the committee. If this proposal is less than perfect and the hon. member has any suggestions on how it could be improved, he may wish to appear before the parliamentary committee. If his suggestions are an improvement, the members of the committee will consider them, and Canada will benefit.

[*English*]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I hope and pray that we can make amendments. I would like to go back to the Charter of Rights that the hon. Prime Minister referred to earlier.

He said in this House, and I heard it very clearly, that the Charter of Rights was not worth the paper it was written on because we had the notwithstanding clause. I am happy to note today that he is making the notwithstanding clause stronger than before because under the proposition you will need 60 per cent of the population.

The requirement is stronger if you want to use it and it will be reduced to a period of three years. We are happy with that because it will make it more difficult to be used, but we would keep it while the Prime Minister said he wants to scrap it.

I want to ask the Prime Minister if in his own personal view it is the intention of this government to make sure that the existing rights under the charter will be the same with this constitutional proposition.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there will be no change in individual rights with regard to any matters raised by my friend as a result of these constitutional proposals.

Should my hon. friend find any in a real way, I am sure he would want to draw it to the attention of the commission and it will deal with it.

I never suggested this morning that the document we were tabling was perfect. It is certainly a perfectible document, but there are no circumstances under which we seek to diminish individual rights.

With regard to the notwithstanding clause, my hon. friend I think is in error. What we did this morning was suggest a means whereby the utilization of the notwithstanding clause is made more difficult. I repeat what I have said from the beginning, that I believe that if a constitution were designed to protect individual rights, then obviously any instrument given to a province to override those individual rights was inconsistent with the original objectives in the first place. That has always been my intention, my view of it.

An hon. member: Take it out.

Mr. Mulroney: My hon. friend says to take it out.

Mr. Chrétien: Over my dead body.

Mr. Mulroney: The Leader of the Opposition says over his dead body. I view this as an unacceptable clause, but we want to make it more difficult for people to use.

[*Translation*]

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Prime Minister. The government has just tabled a new proposal for the recognition of Quebec's distinct character in the Constitution. This morning, speaking on behalf of our party, our leader made it clear he was in favour of enshrining Quebec's distinct character in the Constitution. However, we want this to be done in very clear terms so that everyone understands what is meant, both Quebecers and the rest of Canada.