

Supply

Is the Prime Minister abandoning his commitment to stay out of the constitutional swamp or is it still his resolve to stick to economic, fiscal and social priorities?

That is exactly what the Liberal Party is doing. We are trying to get the economy going and get the country back on track.

Madam Speaker, I can say to you, as a comment, that I have found their position on this issue to be divisive for the country and helpful to the Bloc. The only comparison I will make is that the Bloc is at least honest and forthright about it. I cannot say the same thing about the Reform Party in terms of what it is doing.

What it wants to do is divide the country and it is doing it for crass political purposes.

Mr. White (Fraser Valley West): Madam Speaker, it is just unbelievable the amount of emotion that gets into this process.

The government has moved an amendment today that wants to eliminate such words as "a country that is committed to strengthening our economy". We know that is a problem over there, so it is taking that out. It wants to take out of the amendment "balancing the budgets of our government". It also wants to take out "sustaining our social services, conserving our environment, preserving our cultural heritage and diversity". What is wrong with a good debate on that? It is about time the government started talking in the House about it.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Madam Speaker, the member who just spoke was absolutely right when he said that this is a debate that gets Canadians' emotions going. In that sense it is uncharacteristic of how we usually approach political issues.

The government does not take one day of the year to debate national unity. We make sure that every day of the year, every act of government is about nation building, not tearing the nation down.

The member spoke about how we have to cut the country into little pieces. I heard him say a few moments ago, if we take the power of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, P.E.I., British Columbia and all the other provinces and divide it up into little packets, that all of a sudden this is the new formula for the new federalism.

The Government of Canada believes that we should be tested and measured on our commitment to nation building in every decision that we make. We cannot take a motion which by and large is a series of platitudes. It is a series of motherhood statements, but it is a thinly disguised attempt to once again begin the counterproductive squabbling over the Constitution.

• (1525)

I shook my head when I heard the leader of the Reform Party, who only a few weeks ago stood in his place in the House and

pointed his finger at the Prime Minister, a Prime Minister who for 30 years has epitomized balance, fairness, rightness and nation building, and accused him of being involved in a family feud because he was in his place defending the position of the Government of Canada on a number of very important issues.

I will accede to the point that maybe the Reform Party does not really know what its strategy is, because the approach taken by leader of the Reform Party and his party today actually fuel the cause of breaking up the nation. They fuel the cause of separation. They reinforce, for anyone who cares to hear, the fact that the nation is not being built, the nation is being cut into little pieces.

[Translation]

With today's motion, the leader of the Reform Party tried to do worse than simply launching futile debates. He tried to position the Reform Party on both sides of the fence on basic issues. He tried to play with his party's policies.

[English]

On this issue the leader of the Reform Party is trying to sit on both sides of the fence, and that can be a very painful position.

What exactly does the leader of the Reform Party mean when he talks about sustaining social programs? Does it mean that the party has reversed its position against universal medicare? Does that mean that its members now agree with the government that we should vigorously oppose extra billing? Even more confusing is the motion's reference to "preserving our cultural heritage and diversity". What does that mean, from a party that ran on a platform of abolishing multiculturalism? What does that mean, from a party which introduced another motion to oppose official bilingualism?

The Reform Party has a curiously confused policy. It wants to preserve our cultural heritage and diversity in theory but it wants to oppose it in practice. It is impossible to know what to make of the wording of the Reform Party's motion.

When Reform Party members talk about diversity, are we now to take it that they favour aboriginal self-government? When they talk about equality, do they now favour employment equity? Do they now favour access to decent child care for working parents? When they talk about productive relations with the peoples of the world, are they now in favour of abolishing the cuts that they proposed to foreign aid? When they talk about protecting our lives, are they now favouring the gun control that they so vigorously opposed?

I am certain the answer to these questions is no. The Reform Party hopes that it can get away with some fuzzy language to mean whatever it wants it to mean.