

Oral Questions

You will be asked to approve enabling legislation to provide for greater participation of Canadian men and women in constitutional change.

That is an undertaking which we intend to honour.

The question here has to do with the word "referendum". The hon. member knows that in these circumstances at this time in the province of Quebec, in particular, that is a loaded word. He knows for us to use that loaded word now would be to drive away from Canada people whom we want to draw into Canada. We are interested in keeping the focus of attention upon proposals to renew this Confederation. I hope he would be too.

I certainly do not intend to use words that will drive potential supporters of Canada away from Canada. I ask the hon. member: Is he going to insist on using words which will drive potential supporters of Canada in Quebec away from Canada?

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel): Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the minister that Liberals are not cowards and we are not afraid of words. The word "referendum" means what it means.

In Quebec there was a referendum and there could be another one next year that will allow Quebecers to say yes or no to Canada.

Why are the minister and his colleagues afraid to allow Canadians to say in a national referendum yes to Canada and also yes to Quebec?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I know where the hon. member is coming from on this issue. I know the history of referendum campaigns and I know the connotation the word has.

I repeat the commitment of this government. We intend to honour the undertaking in the Speech from the Throne to find a way for Quebecers and other Canadians to be involved in the decisions with respect to constitutional change. We intend to do that.

I would think that it would be the height of folly for a national government, at a time when we are trying to focus attention upon particular proposals for constitutional change, at a time when we need to draw to the

support of a renewed Canada all of those Quebecers who want a renewed Canada, to use a word that we know is a loaded word and would drive some of those people away today. That would be a serious mistake for Canada.

That may be the strategy of the Liberal Party. That is not the way we intend to conduct this trial because we are seeking to find ways in which we can cause Quebecers and other Canadians to come together behind a renewed federal system.

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

I must say I have a lot of sympathy for the minister because I know where he is coming from, but I have some doubts about some of his colleagues because I know where they are coming from too.

I would like the minister to assure us that all his colleagues including those from Quebec are supporting the minister's initiatives. Can he assure this House that all of his colleagues in Quebec are going to explain to Quebecers the government's proposals and are going to speak for Canada in the province of Quebec?

[*Translation*]

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and the Liberal Party that the members of my government and our supporters here will continue to work towards constructive change in our Canadian federation.

We have put specific proposals on the table and have asked for suggestions for improving those proposals. We do not want to be distracted from this goal through the use of words that may give more weight to the separatist option.

We are here to rebuild Canada. We are not here to help separatists in Quebec or anywhere else.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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[*English*]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.