

heated exchanges with Bloc members on the constitutional future of Quebec.

There are millions of Canadians including Quebecers who want Parliament to focus on deficit reduction, jobs and preserving social services.

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?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my answer is yes to the second part of the member's statement.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Prime Minister.

Does the Prime Minister have any strategies, mechanisms or suggestions for this House to enable the constitutional concerns of the Bloc members to be addressed without allowing them to consume a disproportionate amount of the time and attention of this House?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is very simple. I cannot stop them from talking about separation. They have the freedom to do that.

I know very well that if members of the official opposition keep talking about separation and constitutional problems they are not living up to why they are here. The people in every riding of Quebec want all members of this House to work together to make sure that we have economic growth and job creation.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I have one further supplementary question for the Prime Minister.

Does the Prime Minister envision some special role for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs in this area? Is its focus going to be primarily on Canada-Quebec relations or on relations with all provincial governments?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the minister is charged to deal with all the provinces and to work to try to eliminate a lot of the duplication that exists between the two levels of government. He will deal with all the provinces because it is a concern right across Canada. That type of problem is not only in relation to the province of Quebec. It is with all the provinces. We would like to eliminate a lot of duplication.

When I met with the first ministers in December we went through a list of possible elimination of duplication. The minister is working very actively to make some progress in that field.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

MANPOWER

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, if the prime minister wants to speak on the economy, I remind him that yesterday the premier of Quebec, a true federalist as you well know, made an urgent call to his federal counterpart—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member will ask his questions through the Speaker.

Mr. Gauthier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. You can blame it on my lack of experience.

So I ask my question through you to the prime minister. I remind him that yesterday the premier of Quebec, who is a true federalist and whom the prime minister knows well, made an urgent call to his federal counterpart to solve the issue of overlapping responsibilities in the manpower area. It was an urgent call.

Meanwhile, last Tuesday, his minister of Intergovernmental Affairs associated this agreement with the reform of all Canadian social programs.

• (1430)

Mr. Speaker, my question is as follows: How does the Prime Minister reconcile the urgency to act and the Quebec Premier's request and the gradual strategy of his Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we already discussed this problem with the Premier of Quebec. We would like to find a solution to this problem but it is a very complicated issue. Equalization is also involved, in that it depends on the needs of each part of Canada. Unfortunately, since the Atlantic provinces and Quebec have proportionately more unemployment than the rest of the country, they receive more money.

A way must be found to use federal funds to help unemployed people whom they want to train and to allocate these funds on the basis of regional needs. For this regional distribution, federal authority must be maintained; otherwise, if we simply transfer jurisdiction, the transfers will be made per capita and the province of Quebec will lose a lot.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Prime Minister. Is he willing to pledge right now that he will do his utmost to ensure that this issue is settled without delay, as the Quebec Premier has been requesting, in order to dispel the doubts cast by his Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, what matters is not to respond quickly but to take proper action,