

Oral Questions

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister uses the word "scheme" to refer to what is the clear and straightforward expression of an economic responsibility initiative in the mutual interest of the people of both Canada and Quebec. He himself will have to take note of that after Quebecers vote Yes to sovereignty.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Bouchard: I ask the Prime Minister, who is one of the champions of federalism without any ideas, any thoughts or anything else to offer, how he can claim to be addressing Quebecers' desire for change, when he and other federalists have nothing to offer Quebec but the status quo, the federal system that has always been denounced by Quebec federalists, as well as resignation and increasing encroachment on Quebec's areas of jurisdiction?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition rose in the House today to explain to Quebecers: You will vote for sovereignty, but you will keep Canadian citizenship, the Canadian currency, the Canadian passport, the economic and political union with Canada. The only thing missing in his bag of tricks is what I said in Trois-Rivières: "We in the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois will keep the name "Canada". You can find another one for the rest of Canada, because Canada is so great that we want to keep the name 'Canada' for ourselves".

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will take the next two questions.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

An hon. member: Interesting.

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Prime Minister is not interested in what happens to the economic interests of Quebec after sovereignty. I want to ask him whether, if only for the sake of the economic interests of Ontario and the rest of Canada and the need to maintain trade relations between the parties, he would not feel obliged as Prime Minister to sit down and negotiate with Mr. Parizeau who would have a mandate from the people of Quebec?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am willing to meet Mr. Parizeau at any time to discuss the concerns of Quebecers: job creation, economic growth, and improving the situation with regard to public finances. That is what people want to discuss. I only hope that the Leader of the Opposition will tell Quebecers that their proposal is about separation. That is what they want.

• (1425)

They would have Quebecers believe that once they have separated, they will still be part of Canada. This is a mirage, a lot of smoke and mirrors and shows a lack of intellectual honesty.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): Yes, Mr. Speaker. Let the Leader of the Opposition rise in the House and tell Quebecers and Canadians what he told the Americans: "Please realize I am not a sovereignist, I am a separatist". Let him repeat that to all Quebecers, and he will lose his referendum.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with respect, I deplore the fact that the Prime Minister should dismiss as intellectual dishonesty the wishes of a people that for 300 years has been working towards the culmination of its destiny as a nation and will do so democratically and lawfully.

I want to ask the Prime Minister, when this fall the votes are counted on the evening of the referendum and Quebecers, as I hope they will, vote yes, on the basis of our present mandate, I want to ask him how he sees his responsibilities as custodian of the economic interests of the part of Canada he will still represent?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my position has been known to all Canadians for a long time. I am a federalist, and I believe in a united Canada where Quebec will feel at home.

[English]

I am not the one who has to do some virage to try to find words to hide the truth from the people who will be voting. I know the people of Quebec want to stay in Canada. All the polls say that. Mr. Parizeau came with his astuce in December. That was a flop by the month of March. Then came the Leader of the Opposition who tried to hide the truth. He made a virage. Today the virage is back to square one. He is a separatist and he does not have the guts to say that to the nation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to change the subject to the separation of one of the government ministers from the cabinet.

When we first raised the issue of the heritage minister's dollars for contracts dinner, we were told that it was merely a routine fundraiser to pay off the minister's campaign debts. This was the story of the organizer, Richard Gervais, and was confirmed by many of the guests who attended the dinner.

• (1430)

Now we learn from Elections Canada that the Minister of Canadian Heritage had no election debts to pay. In fact his receipts and reimbursements minus his expenses left him \$25,000 ahead. The dinner was held, therefore, for other purposes, which will go undisclosed until the government releases all the information surrounding the minister's dinner.