

but what the right hon. Prime Minister does not understand now, as the crisis deepens, is that it is important for the federal government to put their position forward publicly, very clearly and very precisely in order to counteract the PQ proposal and their propaganda so that Quebeckers realize a No vote will only plunge them into the status quo?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, clearly, of course, it is essential for the Canadian government to demonstrate to Canadians, including Quebeckers, in a public and concrete way, that there has been a change of attitude here in Ottawa at the federal level. I agree that there is now, with the publication of the white paper, another development in the debate on Canada's future. I agree it is essential that the Canadian government continue its efforts and demonstrate to Quebeckers there has been a change here, that it is quite possible to have not only talk of flexibility but concrete actions to show flexibility. This we have been doing since the May 22 election, and this is the course we intend to go on following.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM—INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO PURSUE POLICY OF PRECEDING GOVERNMENT

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Ottawa-Carleton): I am trying to understand the innermost thought of the right hon. Prime Minister with respect to the constitution and the referendum. Last Friday, he told the House, "Our government will continue to make concrete proposals." Then, later, "What Quebeckers have with this national government is a national government committed to constitutional reform." The second quotation is clearly much broader than the first one and presupposes the discussion of a certain number of interdependent constitutional matters which would resemble, of course, the efforts made by the previous government in this area. To make concrete proposals, it is still necessary to comprehend the interdependence of every one of the proposals to be made. In that context, could the right hon. Prime Minister tell the House whether he intends to continue the efforts made by the previous government at the more recent federal-provincial conferences?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think it is worth while for us to have in the House of Commons someone who can participate in the context of the Pepin-Robarts commission. I hope he intends to suggest positive and concrete proposals during the coming months, as he has in the past, and that he can persuade his colleagues to change the position they have taken in the past.

As to the position of this government, I say to the hon. member that we intend to continue to analyse the status of possible agreements on constitutional changes with the provinces. There have already been talks between the Government of Canada and some of the provinces on the possibility of

making amendments, and similar matters. We do not want to start anew the consultations that have already taken place with the provinces. We want to continue the work done by the former government, but we do not have at this moment a magic formula to present to the House or the people of Canada. We intend to continue the work already started, and I hope we can have the positive contribution of the hon. member and his colleagues.

* * *

INQUIRY OF THE MINISTRY

INQUIRY WHETHER PRIME MINISTER MET PÉQUISTE CANDIDATE

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the right hon. Prime Minister.

The newspaper *Le Devoir* recently reported that the Prime Minister, on the occasion of a visit he made to Montreal, met Mr. Jacques Desmarais, the Péquiste candidate in the by-election of Montreal-Maisonneuve. Will the Prime minister tell us whether it is true that he met that individual who wants to destroy Canada; and, if so, just what was he doing there?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, that man was probably a member of a group which submitted a brief to me about the strike in the port of Montreal, but it was only as such that he was there.

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Prime Minister feels embarrassed because of those meetings and because of the friends he has in Quebec.

[*English*]

It is obvious that the government is very embarrassed by what is taking place—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ouellet: —and does not want us to indicate clearly to Canadians that, in fact, the Prime Minister is making a sweet deal with the Parti Québécois.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Order.

Mr. Ouellet: Is the Prime Minister ready, today, to admit that when he talks about positive action and openness vis-à-vis the provinces and, more particularly, vis-à-vis Québec, the only action that has taken place has been—

An hon. Member: What is the question?

Mr. Ouellet: —giving away to the Quebec government the things that they want.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): There must be a limit, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ouellet: We have witnessed—