

Oral Questions

However, when someone claims, in referring to the issue of a future partnership, that the rest of Canada will have a parliament with the same number of members as Quebec, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in referring to this, says that is out of the question, this is exactly what the provincial premiers have said. Anyone who is the least bit realistic, is not a magician and really wants to face the facts will have no problem understanding this.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to clarify my question for the Prime Minister. I do not think this is a matter of bad faith, not at all, but it is not at all what I meant.

His Minister of Foreign Affairs said that Quebec, with a population of seven million, was too small to expect to negotiate with the rest of Canada with its population of 22 million. This was not about partnership or whatever, this was about negotiating from country to country.

My question is this: Does the Prime Minister agree with his Minister of Foreign Affairs that Quebec is too small to negotiate with the rest of Canada and if he does not agree, is he prepared to set the record straight? That is my question.

• (1120)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all countries conduct negotiations. We negotiate with the Americans. We negotiate with Trinidad and Tobago. We negotiate with countries large and small. That is normal. The political clout, however, is not the same. That is where I notice another change in perception.

For the first time, the hon. member for Roberval said they are going to have a country. He was not talking about partnership. He referred to his country.

When will they have the courage to come out and tell Quebecers: "I am a separatist"? It is nothing to be ashamed of, so why not admit it instead of playing with words and saying at one point that "we will have a partnership", and then "we will not" and then "we will have half, or three quarters". Be honest.

Just say: "We want to separate", and Quebecers—30 per cent of the people who are now saying they intend to vote yes think they will stay in Canada—Does the hon. member want to remain a Canadian, yes or no? I would like to know.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister shows very little tolerance for others, although his own positions are entirely opposed to those of the no committee to which he belongs, an issue that was raised with him yesterday. Why is he so anxious to look for discrepancies in our points of view, when he knows perfectly well that representatives for the no side in Quebec most certainly do not share his position on the Canadian federation. He should be more careful.

Does the Prime Minister agree, since we are talking about his Minister of Foreign Affairs—I realize it annoys him to discuss this but, after all, he should answer the question—does the Prime Minister agree with his Minister of Foreign Affairs, who feels that to deal with duplication and overlap, Quebec should become a province like the others, in other words, close its Travail Québec centres and let the federal government collect its taxes?

That is what his minister said yesterday. Does he agree?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to clarify one of the hon. member's statements. The program being circulated was prepared and accepted by all partners on the no side.

It says in this program that it would be desirable for Quebec to have a veto, and the answer I gave yesterday in the House was clear. We were in favour of a veto for Quebec, but René Lévesque and the separatists dropped the veto. You cannot blame me.

We voted for a distinct society and you voted against it. So today you rise in the House. I want to ask you a very short question: Do you want to remain a Canadian? It is not a difficult question, but you are afraid to tell the truth. He does not want to answer any questions because he is afraid of the truth. We are not. We are Canadians, we want to remain Canadians, and Quebecers want to remain Canadians.

The Speaker: My dear colleagues, I would ask you once more to address your comments to the Chair.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us recall once again that René Lévesque trusted the other premiers, and that they plotted with the present Prime Minister to betray him. This is what happened, and history is a witness.

Lisa Frulla, the deputy chair of the no committee said, this morning, that the principle of the distinct society had to be enshrined in the constitution. She is the deputy chair of the no committee.

Does the Prime Minister, who has been a member of the no committee up to now, as far as we know, agree with the proposal made by its deputy chair?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we voted for a distinct society, and he voted against. He has the gall to rise and talk about it.

Secondly, he does not show a lot of respect for Mr. Lévesque in saying that he did not know what he was doing when he signed it. I think Mr. Lévesque was intelligent enough to know very well what he was doing when he signed it. I have never underestimated Mr. Lévesque's intelligence as the hon. member is doing. He did it consciously. What were his reasons? I am not a member of the PQ, I do not know. We, however, were in favour of a veto, and it was Mr. Lévesque who did not want the veto.