

*Oral Questions***REFORM PARTY**

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I see from the papers that members of the Reform Party are considering combining with the federal Tories. The papers say that the Reformers are disgruntled with their leader and they want a new party led by the member for Calgary West.

• (1415)

It shocks me that members of the third party want to change parties after less than two years in Ottawa. Surely they made commitments in the election campaign to their constituents as members of the Reform Party, not as Tories.

Have they forgotten their campaign promises? Have they consulted with their constituents on this change of party? And what about the so-called Reform budget that was presented recently? What can it be worth if Reformers are going to jump ship so soon after it was released?

We on this side of the House are proud of our party. We are proud of our leader. We know we have great responsibilities as the elected Government of Canada, but we are not daunted by the challenges. We Liberals are going to stay the course to help make Canada an even better place.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Colleagues, I would like to bring to your attention the presence in the gallery of Mr. Boguslaw Liberadzki, Minister of Transport and Maritime Economy of Poland.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: At the same time colleagues, I would like to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Madam Haizhen Zhou, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Jiangsu Provincial People's Congress, Nanjing China, and her accompanying delegation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

CANADA SOCIAL TRANSFER

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with its Canada social transfer, the federal government claimed it was giving the provinces greater autonomy and flexibility with respect to social programs. But in implementing this Canada

social transfer, Ottawa is set to impose national standards for social assistance and post-secondary education, totally disregarding provincial jurisdiction over these areas.

How can the Prime Minister talk about flexible federalism when his government is not only withdrawing from social programs but also threatening to further penalize those provinces that do not comply with the new national standards, which amounts to imposing its views while at the same time denying provincial jurisdiction over social programs?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we plan to do is to ensure that adequate services are provided to all Canadians. The hon. member should have noticed that there are ongoing consultations among the provinces and between the federal government and the provinces to ensure harmonization from coast to coast. This will give Canadians access to acceptable and adaptable services wherever they go in the country.

There is already a high level of co-operation among the provinces. The role of the federal government is to ensure that the agreements reached are as uniform as possible so that people can move freely across the country.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the Prime Minister have the gall to ask the provinces to make up the shortfall resulting from the federal government's withdrawal, while at the same time relegating them to a mere advisory role in developing new and much more restrictive national standards, particularly with respect to health?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, health is covered by legislation. The five major conditions governing health care in Canada—universality, portability and the rest—are in the act. There is a clear commitment by this Parliament with respect to maintaining these five principles.

As for their implementation, discussions are under way between the Minister of Health and her counterparts. We are looking for the best solutions. If services are to be accessible to all Canadians, when Canadians travel across the country, whether on vacation or business, they must be able to rely on the same services in other provinces as in their own. Everyone agrees that Canada's health system is one of the best in the world. We must ensure that it remains that way as much as possible.

• (1420)

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, are we to understand from the Prime Minister's answers that, for him, flexible federalism means that Ottawa is responsible for social programs and the conditions under which these programs are provided to Canadians, while the provinces are concerned only with their administration, when they are facing enormous financial difficulties following his government's withdrawal?