

The literacy program Between the Lines will make a fundamental and lasting contribution to the prevention of crime and the reduction of illiteracy in Canada.

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### PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

**The Speaker:** Before we begin question period today, I would like to draw to members' attention the presence in the gallery of fellow parliamentarians, members of the planning, budgetary and public accounts committee of the Mexican congress.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

## ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

### UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, with its UI reform, the federal government is preparing once again to substantially cut eligibility and UI benefits. According to today's *Globe and Mail*, Quebec will be the principal victim of the additional cuts to the unemployment insurance plan, which will amount to \$1.6 billion.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Would he confirm that, as usual, Quebec will bear the cost of the additional cuts of \$1.6 billion in unemployment insurance, since it will assume 40 per cent of the cuts for a total of \$605 million as compared with only \$255 million for Ontario?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I said it yesterday and I will repeat it today: the government has reached no decision yet. The Minister of Human Resources Development is currently conferring on the matter. There will be a reform of all social programs in the fall to enable us to put funds at the disposal of those who want to work and take training courses.

This is our focus—we want to enable workers to find jobs and recover their dignity. The specific program will be announced once consultations have been completed. At the moment, no one can claim that one party or another in Canada is forced to contribute more than the others.

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in other words, if we unscramble the Prime Minister's answer, we may conclude that no decision has been made, the project is in the works and the *Globe and Mail* was right to refer to it today.

I would ask the Prime Minister if we are to understand that he and his government want to put off a decision until the fall, that

### Oral Questions

is after the referendum on Quebec sovereignty, so that the announcement of the cuts, affecting the unemployed in Quebec primarily, will follow afterwards?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first I am pleased to hear that there will be a referendum. We are looking forward to having one.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice):** I hope that the question will be clear, that they will say "we want to separate from Canada" and that they will not try to trick people into thinking that the intent of the referendum, is anything other than separation.

As for us and our UI program, reforming all the social programs requires consultation with the provincial governments. The minister is consulting them now. The papers can only speculate at the moment. This is not the first time articles have appeared in the papers, with the results of the federal government programs differing entirely from what the *Globe and Mail* saying. This is usually exactly what happens.

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I see that the Prime Minister seems willing to talk about the referendum. He told us that he is looking forward to the referendum and to a straightforward question. Quebecers know full well that the only thing the Prime Minister can offer Quebec is the status quo, the same old unfair cuts, and that his only objective is to finish the job started in 1982.

**Mr. Loubier:** Hear, Hear.

• (1420)

**Mr. Bouchard:** Since he wants to talk about the referendum and wants a straightforward answer—because the answer will be as straightforward as the question—, does the Prime Minister admit that, faced with the decision made by a sovereignist, clearly sovereignist Quebec people, he, as the Prime Minister of Canada, will then have to sit at the table and negotiate on a one-to-one basis with the Quebec government?

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, we would really like to know what the question is. They came up in December with a scheme that the people very quickly got wise to. This whole scheme was nothing but smoke and mirrors. They then tried to change directions, so that the December program was already over by March. Quebecers will probably get wise to the new June scheme by October. Everyone will understand that the opposition leader's question is purely hypothetical, because I know that if Quebecers are asked, "Do you want to separate from Canada?", they will always vote to stay in Canada. I am convinced of that.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.