

Adjournment Debate

The truth of the matter is—and the Prime Minister should admit it—that federalists do not want to take part in consultations on the referendum because they have nothing to suggest but the old status quo. It may be Christmas and a time to eat traditional dishes, but that does not mean the federal government should serve us the same rehash.

In fact, the federal Liberals do not want to travel across Quebec and talk with citizens of every region. When you cannot argue for your political ideas with logical arguments, you use every kind of trick to divert the debate onto procedural details.

You cannot negotiate or manipulate the soul of a nation, nor can you put a price on it. No, the soul of a nation can only be seen if the people can democratically express their will. That is what the Government of Quebec is proposing and what the Prime Minister of Canada is rejecting. The Prime Minister must accept this inescapable fact and take part, with his colleagues, in particular the member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, in the pre-referendum consultations the Government of Quebec will be holding.

[English]

Mr. John English (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before debating the result of the vote, let us address the process. It should be democratic and it should be clear.

We are asking Mr. Parizeau to duly initiate the referendum process, to present his question to the National Assembly and to move on quickly to the *Loi sur la consultation populaire*.

As indicated by Mr. Johnson, we are asking the PQ to end this masquerade, this so-called consultation and to get a clear mandate from the population. In other words, hold a referendum as soon as possible and put an end to the uncertainty. Let the public decide.

The Bloc and the Government of Quebec claim that they are great believers in the democratic process. They talk solemnly about the need to respect this process, but their very first act is to attempt to pre-empt the referendum by introducing a draft declaration of sovereignty which will be voted on by the National Assembly before the people of Quebec have spoken.

There can be nothing less democratic than forcing the National Assembly to vote on a declaration of sovereignty before the people of Quebec have had an opportunity to express themselves at the ballot box.

The Bloc is asking, in the event that Quebecers vote yes to separation, to recognize the people of Quebec, to recognize the right to leave the Canadian federation. Will the Bloc agree that the decision to introduce the draft declaration of sovereignty and to have the National Assembly pass it before the people of

Quebec have spoken through referendum is fundamentally undemocratic and against everything they claim to stand for?

• (1705)

Will the Bloc recognize that the people of Quebec have the right to stay in Canada when they vote no in the referendum?

Quebecers know that they live in one of the greatest countries in the world, a country that they built. This country is evolving and Quebecers have a part to play in this evolution. The burden of proof rests with the separatists.

We are confident, Mr. Speaker, that a strong case will be made for Canada.

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SOCIAL PROGRAM REVIEW

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 17 of this year I asked the Minister of Finance to come clean with Canadians about what the government's intentions were in terms of reducing funding for social programs in this country.

Since that time there has been much speculation. One report indicates a potential cut of \$7 billion contemplated by the government in our social programs envelope. Others, for example the Standing Committee on Finance which has just released a report, project that over the next two years there will be something like a \$3.4 billion cut in social programs.

This discussion that is going on certainly does not take into account the reality of what social programs have contributed to this country. Certainly as a New Democrat I am not against changes to social programs, but clearly Canadians are beginning to realize that the social security review has been merely an attempt to cut expenditures rather than to really and truly change our programs.

If the intent was to change programs, to make them better, to make them more efficient, I think we would have seen a very different process. I think the government has to be clear with Canadians what the intent is around the reduction of revenues in the social program area.

I would remind the government that in 1991 Statistics Canada was very clear that only 6 per cent of our debt could be attributed to social programs. I would suggest to the government that we need equal debate, indeed more debate, on that 94 per cent of the cost of our debt and deficit.

One of the major costs of that is how we finance our programs, not simply what we do within the purview of those programs. Since October 17 when I first posed the question to the minister I continued to raise questions about the financing of the debt. For example, only yesterday I posed the question to the Minister of Finance suggesting that he should have a public inquiry into the role of the Bank of Canada in setting interest rates, because of course the amount of our foreign debt is certainly affecting the