

*Oral Questions*

to have more than just three countries in this association, and we will definitely talk about this at the summit next month in Miami.

**Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we do not need good intentions. We need concrete action on government policies. I would ask the Prime Minister whether he does not consider it essential to maintain the network of Canadian trade commissioners in the United States in order to support the efforts of Canadian businesses, especially SMEs that want to take advantage of new markets that have opened up as a result of NAFTA.

[English]

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is always looking at our country's needs everywhere in the world. Of course with the restriction that every department is facing at this time there is a review of all the posts that are open. We will keep those that are absolutely needed in accordance with the amount of money we can spend.

There is no such proposition whereby we want to reduce the level of trade with the United States. At the same time we want to increase trade with the Pacific rim. Our economy will benefit through good trade relations with the United States and better relations than now with the Pacific where the growth and potential is at this time.

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[Translation]

#### MATTHEW COON COME

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, last Friday in Washington, the Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees, Matthew Coon Come, continued his systematic campaign to denigrate Quebec in the United States, accusing Quebec of racism towards the Crees. In the same speech, he referred to the James Bay Agreement as an instrument for oppression and dispossession.

Does the Prime Minister dissociate himself from Mr. Coon Come's untruthful remarks? Does he intend to instruct the Canadian embassy in Washington to intervene and set the record straight concerning the Crees' situation in Northern Quebec?

• (1420)

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I did not read this speech by the chief of the Crees of New Quebec. I believe that it is not the government's role to go and make speeches whenever someone says something we do not quite agree with.

This Cree chief makes speeches; he has opinions and he expresses them. This does not mean that we must agree with him. In a country where freedom of speech exists, all citizens

are entitled to express their own point of view. When someone says things with which the Bloc Québécois does not agree, it can respond. It has the right to do so. If the Liberals do not agree, they can do the same.

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we noticed that the Prime Minister neither completely agreed nor completely disagreed with Mr. Coon Come. It would be interesting if he could tell us what he agrees with.

Would the Prime Minister not agree that instead of hunting separatists, his ambassador in Washington should spend more time putting the facts straight, since the Cree defamation campaign is bad not only for the image of Quebec in the U.S., but also for the image of Canada as a whole?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was saying earlier that there is freedom of speech in Canada as well as in the United States. No one, anywhere, is supposed to have his or her speeches cleared by the ambassador. People make speeches and if the hon. member does not agree with them, he can answer them. The audience of the Cree grand chief is known. The hon. member can write and put the facts straight.

I know that Crees in Canada have many long-held grievances. I was Minister of Indian Affairs and I know that the citizens of the First Nations have been complaining for a long time. They did not always get justice, and they have reason to complain.

As for his choice of words, when I was minister, I was the target of some inflated vocabulary but I am not the one to rescind their freedom of expression.

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[English]

#### MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT RETIRING ALLOWANCES ACT

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, today is the biggest day on the government's parliamentary calendar though day, when over 50 MPs qualify for lifetime gold plated pensions, well over 80 per cent paid for by the taxpayers of Canada.

For over one year the Prime Minister has promised to allow MPs to opt out of these obscene pensions and to make private arrangements on the same basis as other Canadians.

Does the Prime Minister agree that MPs pensions should be brought in line with private sector standards or not?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we said clearly in the red book that we would deal with some problems regarding pensions of members of Parliament. We talked about double dipping and the situation that prevails when some retire very early in life and get a very big pension.