

Oral Questions

● (1410)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

PREMIER LÉVESQUE'S SPEECH IN NEW YORK—GOVERNMENT ACTION TO COUNTERACT SEPARATIST PROPAGANDA

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Given the fact that Premier Lévesque's address last night to United States businessmen enabled him to outline the Quebec government's view of Canada's future to a large audience of Canadians and Americans, and also given the premier's assumption that his objectives could be achieved with little or no economic dislocation, what specific studies has the federal government undertaken, and what information is being prepared for parliament and for all Canadians, about the strong social, political, and economic benefits that accrue from the federal system?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the minister next to me indicates it is part of our whole activity as a government, and as a party, to spell out to Quebecers in particular and Canadians in general why it is preferable that Quebec remain in confederation.

Miss MacDonald: Given that any uncertainty about the future of the country in the United States might very well affect decisions on investment in Canada which would be detrimental to our economy, and since Mr. Lévesque tried to give the impression that the breakup of Canada is inevitable and that some American businessmen might believe him, what new initiatives in the light of this is the government taking to offset his propaganda given in a foreign country and also to ensure full confidence abroad in our future?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I do not think this is the appropriate place for me to comment on a matter like this. Obviously, it is the duty of all of us as parliamentarians to prove to Canadians on a constant basis that Canada is a better place to be in than if it were broken up by any one province. That is the whole essence of our actions in parliament and that is what we will continue to do. I hope we will be joined in that by the opposition.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I will direct a final supplementary to the Prime Minister since he has not responded to the questions that I put. Given the gravity of the present political situation in Canada, which I hope the Prime Minister does not underestimate, and given the continual public relations campaign against national unity by Premier Lévesque, is the Prime Minister saying that no special efforts other than a continuation of the status quo are being made to hold this country together?

[Mr. Speaker.]

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the action of this government, at least since I have been Prime Minister, has been to try to prove to Quebecers that it was to their advantage to be part of Canada, to remain in confederation. It has been our continuing effort also to indicate to the rest of the Canadian people, those outside of Quebec, that it is to their advantage to keep Quebec in confederation. However, we do not believe that it is enough to say to each other that we love each other. It is important that the rest of Canada adopt certain policies which permit Quebecers to feel that they are an integral part of Canada, that they have equal rights in Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: In other words, Mr. Speaker, if we want to keep Canada together in both of the linguistic communities, we have to accept the reality of the existence of the other and make a number of concessions to accommodate to that reality. This is our approach to national unity. Perhaps the policy research group of the opposition will come up with an alternative policy some time down the road. Then, we will know how the Tories are thinking.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, I am going to pose a supplementary question because, frankly, I resent the inflammatory manner in which the Prime Minister has answered these questions. The questions asked by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands were perfectly straightforward and the Prime Minister can count upon the co-operation of the opposition under our present leader just as he could under my leadership. May I ask the right hon. gentleman whether he intends to continue to try to bait the opposition with regard to this question and conduct it along partisan lines or whether he is really trying to unite this country and all the political parties in meeting this very difficult problem?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: I am surprised that the hon. member for Halifax should assume that it is possible for me to unite the opposition with the government in our approach to Canada, in our approach to federalism. Obviously, we have different ways of pursuing national unity. This has been explored in our programs and debated during successive election periods. We shall continue to do our best.

As to the questions to which I responded a few moments ago asking me to comment on a speech made by a premier of a province in New York, by a premier of whom we know it is the essence of his actions to try to break up the country, I do not think the House expected me at this time to enumerate all the things we have done or shall be doing to try to keep the country united. That is why my response—and I think it was a perfectly proper one—was to indicate that we have a certain approach to confederation which I assume is different from that of the opposition. But we shall continue to promote it and if the opposition wants to join forces with our prescription for