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Soft nationalists urged to aid Tories

Harper mocks Bloc, Liberals; Vote coming 'sooner or later,' PM says in campaign-style speech in rural Quebec

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ST. NARCISSE DE BEAURIVAGE - Prime Minister Stephen Harper descended on small-town Quebec last night to deliver a campaign-style speech to a crowd of about 400 Conservative Party and Action démocratique du Quebec supporters.

He appealed to members of the "greater Conservative family" and moderate Quebec nationalists to return a Conservative majority government in a new election that will come "sooner or later."

And he borrowed a quote from Maurice Duplessis, Quebec's longest-serving premier, whose Union Nationale was allied with the federal Progressive Conservatives, to take a swipe at the Bloc Québécois: "Two parties are enough - a good one and a bad one," the prime minister quoted Duplessis saying.

The Bloc holds 50 of Quebec's 75 seats in the House of Commons but "they haven't done anything, because they can't do anything," Harper said.

"Real (Quebec) nationalists don't want to destroy. They want to build," he added.

The prime minister also attacked the federal Liberals, noting their opposition in the Senate, where they still hold the majority, to Conservative bills like the Accountability Act - which Harper said was framed to ensure there would never again be another sponsorship scandal.

"My friends, the Liberals say they will reverse our tax cuts, take away the family allowance, vote against benefits for seniors, cancel the softwood lumber agreement, tear up the military contracts and all the benefits for industries in the regions, and restore the fiscal imbalance," he charged.

"For that reason we should never turn back to the Liberals. Never."

A re-elected Conservative government would lead a Canada that was "strong, united and free, with a Quebec (that was) autonomous and proud," he said.

There were three Conservative MPs representing Quebec ridings at the fundraising event, and six ADQ MNAs. The ADQ calls itself "autonomist" and considers Harper a ally.

Eric Caire, the ADQ MNA for the Quebec City riding of La Peltrie, said he was there to support Jacques Gourde, the Conservative MP for Lotbiniere-Chutes de la

Chaudiere.

"Jacques Gourde is a friend," Caire said. "He has been an ADQiste for a long time."

Gourde also attended one of ADQ leader Mario Dumont's major rallies during the provincial campaign.

Tomorrow is Harper's birthday. After his speech, which was entirely in French, he was serenaded to the Quebec birthday theme, "Mon cher Stephen, c'est a ton tour de te laisser parler d'amour," to the tune of Gens du Pays.

The prime minister will be 48.

Andre Arthur, the independent MP for Portneuf-Jacques Cartier, who also attended the event, commented: "That's the separatist national anthem."

Harper's birthday cake was decorated with the blue and red Conservative Party logo.

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