

Oral Questions

• (1420)

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs knows perfectly well it is unconscionable for the Prime Minister of Canada to tell his ally, the head of the No committee, that the distinct identity of Quebec society will certainly not be enshrined in the Canadian Constitution.

Will the minister at least admit that the reason the Prime Minister will not include this distinct identity in the Canadian Constitution is that he ran his campaign for the leadership of the Liberal Party on an anti-Meech Lake platform, so much so that the then Minister of Finance said in *Le Devoir* on March 9, 1990: "Jean Chrétien is about to destroy forever the credibility of the Liberals in Quebec"? Would he agree the Minister of Finance was right?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for the Bloc Québécois does a poor job, as he often does, unfortunately, of presenting the position of the Prime Minister of Canada.

In his speech in Quebec City last Thursday, the Prime Minister said: "Quebec is a distinct society because of its language, culture and institutions". Those who were opposed to change in recent years were the members of the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois.

We should remember that the Parti Québécois not only rejected the changes proposed in the Charlottetown Accord but also campaigned to ensure that Quebec would not have the powers and jurisdictions included in Charlottetown.

We must set the record straight. Those who are in favour of continuing change and development in Canada and Quebec and who support the best interests of Quebec are not those who want to break up the country and separate Quebec, with all the negative consequences that would ensue.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the joint statement issued by the Prime Minister of Canada and the leader of the No side on the weekend in an effort to cover up the deep division between them, they say that they have not changed their minds about the distinct society and that they still believe this basic Canadian reality should be acknowledged.

Will the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs admit honestly that the real position on the notion of a distinct society is the one expressed by the Prime Minister on September 11, 1995, when he said that there was absolutely no need to enshrine in the constitution the fact that Quebec francophones are distinct from other Canadians. Dixit Jean Chrétien.

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to repeat the last paragraph of the statement again, because the answer is the same.

However, what is important to see is that the official opposition is trying to shift attention away from the real issue of the referendum debate. In the referendum debate, the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois want to separate Quebec from Canada. Their aim is not a partnership, as Mr. Bouchard has finally agreed. Their aim is not a distinct society either. These are empty questions, because Mr. Parizeau has clearly indicated that he could not care less about a distinct society.

Their aim is to separate Quebec from Canada, and they will be responsible for breaking up Canada and causing the ensuing negative effects for Quebec.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister how Quebecers can trust the Prime Minister of Canada when he claims to be in favour of the concept of a distinct society when we know those who made him head of the party, like Clyde Wells, are completely and unconditionally opposed to a distinct society—thank you Clyde, we remember—and will never permit the Prime Minister to go back on a commitment he made in the leadership race, which he won specifically because he was opposed to the Meech Lake Accord, unlike the present Minister of Finance, who was in favour.

• (1425)

The Speaker: My dear colleagues, I would ask you to not use the name of any member who has sat here in this House and to always use their title as minister, if that is the case, or of leader of the opposition, rather than using their name.

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what counts at the moment is finding out which option will enable Quebec to best cope with the problems of the world to come. The Prime Minister of Canada agreed with Charlottetown, which contained a whole series of measures that would have enabled Quebec to acquire certain jurisdictions it wanted. The Parti Québécois was the one opposed.

The option that will enable Quebec to continue to develop and cope with its problems in the future is the option that implies that Quebec will remain in Canada, where it has developed harmoniously for 128 years and that it will continue its quiet revolution within the constitution. I would point out that the first quiet revolution took place while Quebec came under the constitution.