

*Oral Questions***CONSTITUTION****MEECH LAKE ACCORD—EQUALITY OF WOMEN**

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, in dealing with another area of concern I want to ask the Prime Minister the following question. Although it is certainly not my view that the distinct society clause in the Accord threatens sexual equality rights, or any other rights provided in the Charter, as the Prime Minister knows there have been expressed concerns to the contrary. Since out of an abundance of caution in other areas amendments were accepted, if I can put it this way, between Part A and Part B in the development of the Accord, will the Government consider appropriate wording for the same reason to help obliterate those concerns about the equality impact on women, in particular, that have been expressed?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, people will have to vote up or down on this, yea or nay, in favour of the Meech Lake Accord. It is our judgment, and it appears to be the judgment of the parliamentary committee, that the overwhelming weight of the evidence sustains the view that individual rights of this kind are not negatively impacted by the inclusion of the reference to distinct society. That is my view. That is the view of the Government.

I know that there are views at variance with this, and they have been respectfully considered by the parliamentary committee. As I understand it, it is the judgment of the parliamentary committee that in the national interest we ought to proceed and that fundamental assurances can be given as to the protection of those rights without any changes being made in the wording of the distinct society clause. We believe that one cannot have it both ways. One has to be for or one has to be against. But one cannot be on both sides of a fundamental issue.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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FISHERIES**CANADA-FRANCE DISPUTE—REPORTED MEETING BETWEEN
CANADIAN NEGOTIATOR AND FRENCH PRIME MINISTER**

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. This morning the Premier of Newfoundland telexed the Prime Minister asking him to confirm an allegation that Canada's chief negotiator in the Canada-France fish talks, Yves Fortier, held a secret meeting with French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac last week during the two days of negotiation in Paris. The Premier says that the Canadian negotiating team, including Newfoundland, was unaware of the secret meeting and unaware of the matters discussed during that meeting.

In light of last January's agreement between Canada and France signed behind Newfoundland's back, an agreement for which the Prime Minister's Government apologized, can the Prime Minister today absolutely assure the House that no secret meeting took place in Paris and that no secret deal has been made once again behind Newfoundland's back?

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Hon. Member that no such secret meeting, as he characterizes it, took place in Paris. There was a courtesy call, for lunch, I believe.

I might say that had members of the delegation from his province hung around they would have been told that such a meeting was occurring, as the other delegations were.

REQUEST THAT TALKS BE SUSPENDED

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Is the Minister telling the House of Commons that the only meeting that took place was a lunch meeting with all the Canadian delegation present? Or is he denying that a private meeting occurred between Canada's negotiator and the Prime Minister of France? He knows that in light of the history of this Government's bungling of these talks, and in light of the history of its apology for one secret deal, no private meeting is acceptable to all members of the Canadian team. I ask him to confirm or deny that a private meeting took place.

If such a meeting took place I ask him to suspend Canada's chief negotiator and to suspend these talks until common ground can be found between the Government of Canada and all of the partners in ensuring a fair and equitable fish treaty between Canada and France.

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, this line of reasoning is ludicrous coming from a member of the Party that created this problem in the first place, and who sat for years, along with his colleagues, and did nothing about it.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tobin: Answer the question!

Mr. Siddon: Mr. Speaker, we sincerely regret the fact that the Premier of the Hon. Member's province has chosen to withdraw from this process.

Mr. Tobin: Was there a meeting, yes or no?

Mr. Siddon: We are trying to rectify a problem that results from 20 years of neglect and indecision on the part of the Government of which the Hon. Member was a part.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!