

Oral Questions

My question is directed to the Minister of Labour. Would she agree that these last minute promises, made in a panic by the Prime Minister a week from the referendum, sound very familiar to Quebecers who remember the referendum in 1980?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister of Canada explained his point of view to all those who believe in the no side, saying how serious the situation and the choice made on October 30 were for the future of our country, and that this was a choice Quebecers had never had to make before in their entire history, because just one vote would mean the break-up of Canada.

So the Prime Minister urged all Quebecers to think carefully before they voted, to think carefully about what Canada is today, what Quebecers are today, before they go and vote. That was basically the Prime Minister's message last night.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are discussing the complete about-face made by the Prime Minister.

I therefore want to ask the Minister of Labour why Quebecers should trust someone who made promises to them last night, when only last Sunday in New York, he bluntly rejected the demands of Daniel Johnson, the chair of the no committee? Why should we trust the man who betrayed Quebec in 1982?

The Speaker: Once again, my dear colleagues, I would ask you to be very careful about your choice of words used in both questions and answers.

This is a question and answer period, so I hope we can keep reasonably calm.

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the hon. member for Roberval, the Prime Minister of Canada is aware of the gravity of the situation and does not take the destruction of this country lightly.

This country is not just any country. It is the best country in the world. And the Prime Minister of Canada has always been a proud francophone, a proud Quebecer and a proud Canadian. In this, he is like the majority of Quebecers who are proud to be Quebecers but are also attached to their country, Canada. That is where the Bloc Quebecois is wrong.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the editorial writer for the *Daily Gleaner* in Fredericton wrote the following on Monday: "At the beginning of the referendum, the rest of Canada was asked to remain silent". In return for that silence, assurances were given that there would be no promise of constitutional change for Quebec.

• (1420)

Does the Minister of Labour agree that this revelation of an agreement between the Prime Minister of Canada and people in the other provinces outside Quebec is strangely similar to what happened that night in 1980, when Quebec was betrayed by the same man, the same—

The Speaker: I want to ask the hon. member for Roberval to please change the word he used. I would appreciate it if this word were not used in the House of Commons.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, to conform to your instructions, I will change the word I used. So is this not strangely similar to what happened at a time Quebecers remember with sadness in their hearts, when they had problems with the same man, in the same way, with the same players and for the same reasons?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, oddly enough, in this referendum campaign, the three leaders who want the break up of this country had to sign an agreement among themselves. It is the only written agreement in this referendum campaign. On the other side, we have Quebecers who do not want the break-up of this country, and to share the same goal, we do not need an agreement in writing.

If there is anyone today who could not care less about the distinct society concept that we as Quebecers support, it is the leader of the yes side who said in no uncertain terms: "To hell with a distinct society. We want a country". That is what the choice is about on October 30. It is about the break-up of Canada as we know it today, and that is why it is such a serious matter.

Mr. Gilles Dupeppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister made the following statement, and I quote: "Any changes in constitutional jurisdiction will only be made with the consent of Quebecers". This somewhat ambiguous statement is devoid of any meaning; moreover, the Prime Minister took great care not to pronounce the words "right of veto", but rather allowed the idea to circulate without ever stating it.

Will the Minister of Labour confirm that the Prime Minister's statement does not in any way constitute a right of veto as Quebec has always understood and demanded it, but is instead a vague promise that is more or less devoid of meaning?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think this is evidence of a lack of desire to properly understand what the Prime Minister of Canada said yesterday. The Prime Minister of Canada was very clear about the distinct society and said that he accepted it.

He was very clear in stating that the constitutional changes affecting Quebec will be made after consultation with Quebec-