

Oral Questions

That is not a nuance, as the Prime Minister attempted to portray to the House yesterday. That is a fundamental difference of opinion. I ask the Prime Minister how can he retain a Secretary of State responsible for minority language rights in this country, and their protection, with such a fundamental difference right at the heart of his Cabinet?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition refers to the greatest disappearing act since Houdini. It is the greatest disappearing act since Turner!

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: Cheap shot.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to—

[*English*]

Ms. Copps: You are a slimebag. Speak in English.

Mr. Mulroney: The Member for Hamilton East says: "You are a slimebag. Speak in English". She is suggesting that by speaking in French I am doing something wrong.

[*Translation*]

What you have just said is appalling!

[*English*]

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister continues to act in the good tone of this House of Commons.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

CONVENING OF FIRST MINISTER'S CONFERENCE—ROLE OF SECRETARY OF STATE

The Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said yesterday that—

Mr. Speaker: As I said yesterday, this is a very important matter for this country. It is appropriate that all Hon. Members extend a level of courtesy to those who ask questions and also to the Minister who gives the answer.

May I repeat that this is a very important matter, not only for now but for the future of our country.

The Right Hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

M. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday and the day before, the Prime Minister stated in this House that he would call a conference of First Ministers to discuss the matter of the override clause.

I ask him, what role will the Secretary of State be playing at that conference? The Prime Minister wants to do away with the override clause. His Secretary of State wants to keep it.

How are they going to sit together at that conference?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the notwithstanding clause was agreed to by my predecessor in 1981-1982 and it has always been my personal view that a notwithstanding clause is incompatible with a Charter of Fundamental Rights. This is a personal view that may not be shared by everyone, but as far as I am concerned it has always been my belief that if a Prime Minister said: On one hand I give you—

[*English*]

On the one hand I give you inalienable rights, and on the other hand, by the way, I forgot to tell you, I am going to allow the Premier of a given province to override your inalienable rights. That to me indicates that there is something very fundamentally wrong with the Charter of Rights and the granting of an override. That has always been my position in respect of that override clause.

Ms. Copps: So tell Lucien.

Mr. Mulroney: The Premier of Quebec, as I indicated, did not ask for that override clauses. He was excluded from that ultimate result.

The override clause, having been granted by my predecessor, the exercise of that now presents in its result a problem for all Canadians, including the Leader of the Opposition and myself.

• (1430)

I have found that what we inherited, the constitutional result of 1981-82, is gravely flawed. While at Meech Lake compromises were made—and it is true that compromises were made—there has never been a concession ever made of which I am aware as grave as that which was granted in 1981-82, when the provinces were allowed to override our so-called inalienable rights as Canadians.