

*Oral Questions*

● (1425)

*[Translation]*

That is what I said in Quebec during the election campaign and that is exactly what I am saying today.

*[English]*

I call to my friend's attention, in regard to the instrument that gave rise to the problem we are dealing with, a press conference that took place on Wednesday, November 18, 1981, as reported by Robert Sheppard and Michael Valpy, in which the then Prime Minister was asked about the agreement to let Legislatures override fundamental legal and equality rights, about whether the Government of Canada under the new Constitution had consented to different language rights for Canada and for the rest of the country.

At page 322 it states: "Well, yes', said the Prime Minister with some candor. 'You are asking me now', he said, 'if I consider it' the Constitution—a success. No, I consider it an abject failure.' He abruptly stood up and walked hurriedly outside into the rain into his waiting black limousine leaving the riddle behind him". The riddle is still here. The riddle and the challenge of language rights will only be solved by tolerance, generosity, and leadership, such as the kind that Members of this House I believe have always provided.

That is the commitment that we have made in regard to language rights elsewhere.

We have been left with a less than perfect instrument which we must all try to correct.

*[Translation]*

QUERY WHETHER PRIME MINISTER SHARES VIEW OF  
SECRETARY OF STATE

**Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Right Hon. the Prime Minister and relates to the series of questions asked by the Leader of the Opposition.

I appreciate the Prime Minister's remarks about the notwithstanding clause, and I should like to ask him how he can reconcile the statements he has just made with those of his Secretary of State who must also champion the rights of official languages minorities.

So I am asking the Prime Minister whether his views are shared by his Secretary of State, or whether his being away from the House attests to his disagreement with the Prime Minister?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Given the seriousness of the debate, Mr. Speaker, I am surprised by this kind of question. Would it be fair on my part to ask whether the fact that the Leader of the Opposition has been away for two days indicates that he disagrees with the Hon. Member for Shefford? Surely the Leader of the Opposition had good reasons to be absent, just as the Secretary of State does. He deserves as much consideration on the part of the Hon. Member for Shefford.

## PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION

**Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford):** By way of a supplementary, Mr. Speaker, I will not seek justification for the absence of the Secretary of State, but justification for his remarks. I am asking the Prime Minister how he can reconcile the position he has just stated—and I agree with him—with that of his Secretary of State, which happens to be the opposite. Are there two kinds of truth for the Government, or is the Government trying to have its cake and eat it too? I would like the Prime Minister to tell us the Government's clear, precise and specific position which agrees with that of the Secretary of State because the Secretary of State is supposed to be the authorized spokesman for official languages minorities, and the matter comes under his responsibilities as Minister and Secretary of State.

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Yesterday I explained that there is no contradiction whatever in the position of the Secretary of State and mine as expressed to *La Presse*. I speak for the Canadian Government as Prime Minister of Canada. What I said is the full position of my Government, and all Members, I mean all Ministers endorse this position.

Now are there differences concerning certain nuances? I would draw the attention of the House to a statement made the day before yesterday by my friend and published in *La Presse* of December 20. I quote:

Mr. Lapierre has stated that the privileges of the National Assembly must be respected. According to him, federal MPs can only express personal opinions.

So the privileges of the National Assembly must be respected if it is to legislate in fields under its jurisdiction, and that is exactly the opposite of what your leader has just said.