

Oral Questions

Prime Minister of Canada himself made that statement in this House. Is that not clear enough?

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the Minister of Labour was gracious enough to answer the question, I will ask her another one.

When the Minister of Labour says before this House and before all Quebecers who are listening that the Prime Minister is prepared to include in the Constitution the principle of a distinct society, is she referring—and this is my question—to the Charlottetown version preferred by the Prime Minister, in other words, a meaningless concept subordinate to the equality of the provinces and rejected by all Quebecers, or is she referring to the distinct society concept in the Meech Lake Accord, which the Prime Minister opposed? Which version is it, Madam Minister?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, which distinct society is the hon. member for Roberval talking about? Is he talking about the distinct society of Meech Lake, which Mr. Parizeau said at the time was an empty shell? Is he talking about the distinct society of Charlottetown, which the hon. member and the Bloc Quebecois refused to endorse?

Is he talking about that distinct society? Is he talking about the distinct society Mr. Parizeau referred to last week, when he said: "To hell with distinct society, I want the separation of Quebec"? What is he talking about? We on this side are willing to state quite clearly that Quebecers are a distinct society in Canada.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, this is a very serious question, a question to which I would appreciate an answer, not this beating around the bush by the Minister of Labour in full view of the whole province of Quebec.

My question—I will give her a second chance, and I would appreciate an answer—is this: Would the Minister of Labour be so gracious and so kind as to tell Quebecers who are listening, when she says she supports a distinct society, does she support a distinct society as defined in Charlottetown, which was rejected by all Quebecers, or does she support the distinct society defined in the Meech Lake Accord? Which one is the Minister of Labour, as a minister of this government, referring to when she says she supports this concept? We would like to know.

• (1420)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have a very serious decision to make. It is serious because on October 30, we decide whether or not we will break up Canada. That is what we are all going to do on October 30.

When I hear the hon. member for Roberval, it sounds like he is saying: "Madam Minister, put the distinct society in the Consti-

tion and we will forget about our referendum". I do not think that is what he meant. But the fact is that between now and October 30, we want Quebecers to think carefully. We know we have a distinct society in Quebec, and we are proud of it. We are also proud to be Canadians, and that is why we will say no on October 30.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the premier of Newfoundland, Clyde Wells, said he considered that Quebec was indeed a distinct society but that there was no question of its having any particular status or real powers. These words killed the hopes of the no side, and especially of Daniel Johnson and Pierre Paradis, who are still begging the Prime Minister of Canada to commit himself to including this concept of a distinct society in the constitution.

Will the Minister of Labour admit that the government of Canada could not include the notion of a distinct society in the constitution, even if it wanted to, because there will always be the likes of Clyde Wells, Frank McKenna and Roy Romanow there to tell us to forget about any ideas of a distinct society?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have never heard a worse example of twisting someone else's words. Never.

Clyde Wells has acknowledged that Quebec is a distinct society. Mike Harris has acknowledged that Quebec is a distinct society. Why twist these facts on the eve of such a serious choice, a choice that concerns all of us, Quebecers and other Canadians both? What is going on? What is going on with the yes side? Are they running short of arguments for selling us on their option of Quebec's separation?

This week is a week of great significance and we must reflect upon the meaning of this vote, and not allow Quebecers to think that they will still wake up Canadian the next morning. This is where the importance of the October 30 vote lies. I would like to see the yes side at least have the courage to tell Quebecers openly what their option is on October 30.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at least now we know that the Minister of Labour shares Clyde Wells' definition of a distinct society, as does the Prime Minister. Fine then. It goes over very well here in the House, but far less well in Quebec, as the minister is aware.

The people who are getting worried at this point are Daniel Johnson and Pierre Paradis, not those in the yes camp. Those in the same camp as her, her former colleagues if she can still remember.

Would the Minister of Labour have the courage to be frank with her friends in the no group, her former colleagues, telling them that should there be a no vote on the referendum the predictable outcome of the 1977 constitutional negotiations will again be a resounding failure, as the good buddy of the Prime