

forgot to mention that they are for a charter of rights only if the provinces agree.

However, at the September conference the provinces very clearly said they do not agree with a charter of rights. Without one where would women be left? They would be left without a guarantee of rights in the constitution. We are committed to this issue. We took a step far beyond anything hon. members opposite were prepared to take, and we are prepared to take it now. If hon. members opposite are committed and really believe in the equality of women, let them stand up and say they will support this government in its move to provide a charter of rights in the Constitution of Canada. I do not hear them saying that. What they are really saying is that there should be provincial agreement.

Mr. Lyon of my province said we do not need a charter of rights and Manitoba would veto any attempt to include one under the formula discussed. What is the result? The result is a great big zero in terms of the position taken by the Conservative Party of Canada as far as women are concerned.

The hon. member for New Westminster-Coquitlam said that I made statements critical of the stand taken by the advisory council with respect to the Constitution. That is quite wrong. I wholeheartedly endorsed that stand, and in fact wrote to some 40 or 50 women's groups across Canada inviting them to make representations to the committee. I wrote a letter on October 28 of last year indicating that a committee was established, and inviting those groups to appear. Furthermore, I was prepared to meet with a number of women's groups—which I did during the fall of last year—from one end of Canada to the other and to talk with them about the constitution. I made certain comments about the stand being taken on a legal basis that in some ways it did not go far enough and that some of the legal questions should have been examined.

Is there something wrong when a minister of the Crown treats an advisory council with great respect, as I did, to the point where I was prepared to get into a discussion with its members? I did not treat them in a perfunctory way. I treated them with such respect that I was prepared to talk with them and give them my ideas. If that is somehow an abrogation of ministerial responsibility, then there is a very strange understanding among hon. members opposite as to what a minister should do. Surely a minister should be prepared to engage in dialogue and discussion.

I will conclude my discussion of this by asking how the recommendations which were brought before the committee were accepted by this government. Do hon. members think that they translate by magic? A number of ministers were around the table, including myself and others, who supported and represented that point of view. Changes in the constitution were made and amendments put down by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien), incorporating the recommendations of the advisory council and of other women's groups. If hon. members are looking for a clear demonstration of commitment, willingness to listen and responsiveness, what clearer evidence can be provided than the fact that we did take those recommendations seriously, and did bring them forward as

government recommendations to the joint committee on the Constitution?

I suggest that hon. members opposite are guilty of selective editorializing in relation to the evidence. I suppose that is a polite way of saying they really are not shaking the whole deck down.

I am very much committed with respect to this issue. When it came to the issue between the executive committee and the council, I stated all along the simple principle that it was up to the council to decide. It was not for me to decide whether a conference should be held. It was up to members of that committee to decide. If they had decided to cancel it in the first place, that was their decision to make.

The only time I became involved in their discussions was when they telephoned my office asking if I would meet with them to discuss the matter. Contrary to allegations which have been made, never at any time did I deal directly with members of the committee or members of the council. They approached me. I met with them on a Friday morning. They asked for my opinion. I gave it to them. That was the last contact on that discussion. They made their own decision. It was a controversial decision.

One of the members, the president, disagreed with the decision and took her dispute to the public charging that there was some kind of political manipulation. What is manipulation? I suppose there are enough good politicians in this chamber to know that if a politician really wants to manipulate, he must get on the telephone, twist arms, and try to persuade. I did none of those things.

Mr. Nielsen: How did you do it?

Mr. Axworthy: I did not do it at all; that is the point. Allegations have been made which have never been founded.

I will go back to the hon. member for Waterloo who seemed to say that his case is founded on rumour and allegation.

Mr. McLean: I did not say that. I said it is supported.

Mr. Axworthy: I apologize. He said it was supported by rumour and allegation.

Mr. McLean: The facts are there, and there are others.

Mr. Axworthy: There is a slight nuance there; I accept that.

Miss Jewett: You got the mole to do it.

Mr. Axworthy: The fact is that that was a dispute between the president of the council and the executive committee. The next forum for that to be discussed in was the entire council. I recall how, with great zeal, before the council met the hon. member for New Westminster-Coquitlam said, "I am confident that tomorrow all things will be resolved by that council."