

desire of Canadians to maintain regional and ethnic cultures and traditions? Those elements of our Canadian system of government, if they were mentioned at all, did not feature prominently in speeches which were filled with talk of failure, with bitterness and contempt for those in Parliament and for the provincial levels of government who dare oppose one man's constitutional plans.

The Prime Minister and his confederates in the New Democratic Party have chosen not to co-operate with Canadians to modernize a Constitution which has served this country well, but to impose one man's constitutional vision against their wills. That this course was followed at all is, of course, regrettable. That it was followed, even though it was unnecessary, is tragic.

My party believes that our Constitution can be amended in a way which respects Canadian traditions and unites our people. That is why my leader took the courageous decision last October to oppose the government's constitutional juggernaut. Our party fought for and won the right of Canadians to see and hear the constitutional committee's deliberations. We fought for and won an extension of hearings so that more Canadians could be heard respecting their Constitution. We fought for and won improvements for the charter of rights, including protection of the rights of handicapped Canadians and now a recognition that rights come, not from a benevolent and all powerful government, but from God. We fought for and won an opportunity for Quebecers to express their feelings in the recent provincial election before Parliament concluded its hearings. We fought for and won a chance for Canada's premiers to make their proposal on an amending formula before debate was closed off in Parliament. We fought for and won the right of Canada's Supreme Court to judge the legality and constitutionality of Ottawa's proposals before it was too late.

These were significant victories by anyone's standards. They were significant not just for the Progressive Conservative party but for all Canadians. In each instance they were fought for with courage and determination by my leader and my colleagues. In each instance they were fiercely resisted by the government.

When the history of these events is written, it will record the fact that if this party had followed the course which is being chosen by the NDP, a course of silent complicity as Canadian traditions and practices have been shunted aside, then the government's proposals would have long ago been sent to Britain and written into law in a form which would have been seriously deficient, dangerously divisive and possibly illegal.

● (1620)

But although we have won significant victories for Canadians, the resolution and the methods being used by the government to bring it into law are still seriously flawed. When the Prime Minister stated on March 23 that our objections related exclusively to the form of the changes proposed by the government and not to the substance, his claim was false, as anyone who has followed this debate since last fall will know.

### *The Constitution*

I want to turn for a few minutes to the remarks which were made here by the Minister of Justice today, because, sadly, what we are seeing in what will be one of the final interventions by the Minister of Justice in this debate is a tone of bitterness, a tone of sarcasm, and a tone of contempt for those who oppose what the government is attempting to do to Canadians. I think that that is not the tone on which we should be going about trying to change our Constitution in Canada. I do not think that the comments he made—in which, in many instances, he misrepresented the proposals being made by our party and the effect they would have upon the constitutional activities of this country—should be allowed to stand unchallenged.

First of all, the Minister of Justice took credit for the fact that the government was finally recognizing that there should be reference to the fact in our Constitution that we recognize the divinity of God. Yet if one reads the amendment which is proposed by the government, which is very simple and straightforward, one finds that it adds the following, immediately after the heading "Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms" on page 3: "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law." There could be no more sterile or arid description of what we believe is a very fundamental principle. That is why, when we moved in our amendment that the principle of the sovereignty of God be recognized, we did so by borrowing wording which came from the Diefenbaker Bill of Rights which reads as follows:

—affirming that the Canadian Nation is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, the dignity and worth of the human person, and the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions;—

Affirming also that men and institutions remain free only where freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law.

That is how Mr. Diefenbaker, when he proposed his Bill of Rights, dealt with this issue. This is how we feel the charter of rights should read in its preamble. Yet what the government has chosen to do is to grudgingly make the most insipid and arid description of a very fundamental principle that it could possibly find.

If, indeed, the government agreed with the representations which were made by literally thousands of Canadians from coast to coast, if it believed that it was wise to include reference to God in the charter of rights, then why did the government's leading constitutional spokesman, in the constitutional committee, Senator Austin, make this statement? It is reported in the minutes of the constitutional committee of February 9, 1981. He was talking about the amendment to the Constitution which we had proposed which would recognize the supremacy of God. He said this:

What I said at that time in the Committee, and I want to repeat it here, is that the main difficulty with the Conservative amendment was that it was tacked on to the resolution in the wrong place. It belongs in stage two as a preamble, and it belongs as a preamble to the entire constitutional process, and not to a portion of it. My own view is that the Conservatives are trying to downgrade God—

Listen to this, Mr. Speaker:

—and we will put him in his right place at the right time.