

*The Constitution*

We must look at the manifestations of this action across the country and hear what the groups are saying. Let us not be led to believe that it is merely a matter of the provinces versus the nation; let us hear the people through their groups and institutions as they speak to us as Members of Parliament.

Let us remember that as a nation we have lived by consensus and that we have agreements. The quality of life that we celebrate is the result of consensus. The provinces have been a part of important agreements which allow our country to operate. We can think of the Old Age Pension Act in 1927, the depression years and the series of annual relief acts, the hospital insurance plan, the Canada Assistance Plan, medical insurance, unemployment insurance and the Canada Pension Plan. In each case the federal government and the provinces reached consensus and found ways to accommodate their differences.

I serve one of the most unique and rewarding ridings in the country, the new riding of Waterloo which takes in Kitchener-Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to live and work in Prince Edward Island and Atlantic Canada and to serve as a civil servant in Manitoba. I have worked in Saskatchewan and I was raised in British Columbia. As I look at this country from coast to coast, I see the resources and the differences and I celebrate them. I crave a process which will allow us to hear one another more fittingly and more fully.

In my own riding I see the need for consensus in order to accommodate the great and exciting diversity of the area. The Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites settled the region. They were followed by German craftsmen whose heritage is kept alive by the German clubs and the annual celebrations of Oktoberfest. The 1971 census showed that 32 per cent of the population of Waterloo is of German origin, as is 27 per cent of the population of Kitchener. In recent years this area has led the country in receiving the boat people. Across the community, in the universities and in the workplace we find the Germanic and Asian groups coming together with a diversity of peoples and interests which range from the farming communities to small business to the electronics industry, the rubber workers and the insurance industries. They have different agendas, yet find the forums to hear each other in order to build a community with pride, one for another. The process of finding consensus in moving ahead, in terms of our seeking a national constitution, is wrong.

● (1250)

The complexities are many. But we must take the time, as we do in our communities, to understand the issues and to listen to them. As this debate goes on, and through the televising of the committee hearings, people realize the confrontational style of "Here is the package; you must do it". This attitude is bringing more resentment than unanimity.

From the government benches we hear the argument raised from time to time that this country is difficult to govern. Someone has said it cannot be governed. I believe that Canada can be governed. I believe that our pluses far outweigh our minuses. Canada has today, which it did not have in the past,

an excellent network of communications and of transport. We can meet each other. We can talk to each other, often via electronics. We can communicate.

I had the opportunity to serve Canada while living abroad in Nigeria for some five years. I think of the difficulties that young nation had in nation building. I think of the major cleavages and the strong feelings among tribal groups and among major religious groups. Initially, that nation's historic pattern was to try a unitary system. That was unsuccessful. But then the nation's builders listened to all parts of the country. A constituent assembly was formed which enabled the diverse sections of the country to be heard. As people began to talk again after the tragic civil war, they began to find structures which would accommodate their diversity. We now find a modern day Nigeria moving ahead. It is made up of 19 States. Its system of government had gained and is gaining strength through the recognition of its diversity.

On the matter of rights, we come to a question of philosophy which is important for Canadians to address, both in terms of personal worth and in terms of the focus by which they approach life in our nation.

Let me suggest that the discussion around whether or not our charter will include a reference to God is one which goes to the nub of the issue in terms of the point where we begin. Do we begin with inalienable rights or do we begin with rights which are somehow granted by the government?

In committee, representatives of the Progressive Conservative Party suggested in a motion that a preamble be added to the charter of rights. It was rejected by the committee. However, the preamble would have affirmed that the Canadian nation is founded on principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God, the dignity and worth of the human person and the position of the family in a society of free individuals and institutions. Individuals and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law.

As the record will show, this motion in committee was opposed by the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson). The argument was that many people do not believe in God; therefore, the reference should not be included, that any such inclusion would diminish their rights as a consequence. There was some discussion that this ought to be in the preamble instead of Clause 1 of the charter, and if so, it could be approved by the provinces. We should remind ourselves that our Judeo-Christian roots have had a reference to God as part of the building process of this nation and its values. Immigrants coming to Canada came for the freedom to express their concepts of God as they saw fit, so the Mennonites, the Hutterites and the Soviet Jews came.

God and the motivation of that belief has played an important part in the building of our nation. Take, for example, hospitals, agricultural development and transport. These roots come from the premise that God gives life and gives rights, and governments perform under God. God grants rights, not governments. Governments are there to see that rights are maintained. The charter we agree upon is to serve that func-