

The Constitution

Mr. Hopkins: We are doing it because the R. B. Bennett government never changed that at Westminster in 1931.

Mr. Andre: You flunked history at night-school.

Mr. Hopkins: If more initiative had been taken at that time we would not be debating this in the House today.

Canada is an influential middle power in the world and there is no way we should allow this situation to continue and, in all reality, I am sure that our friends in Britain will be glad to see this matter cleared up once and for all.

I and other members and senators have received comments to the effect that a reference to God has been left out of the Constitution. I want to make it very clear that this is not the case and that anyone who is spreading this is inaccurate in their statements.

On June 10, 1980, this government, headed by the Right Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, tabled in the House of Commons, a preamble which was entitled "A Statement of Principles for a New Constitution." It was one or more of the provinces who asked that this preamble be set aside and discussed at a later date. It is one of the items which will undoubtedly be taken up at the first ministers' conference following the patriation of the Constitution from Great Britain.

I will cite the preamble which we urged upon the provinces to include in this Constitution, as follows:

We, the people of Canada, proudly proclaim that we are and shall always be, with the help of God, a free and self-governing people.

Born of a meeting of the English and French presence on North American soil which had long been the home of our native peoples, and enriched by the contribution of millions of people from the four corners of the earth, we have chosen to create a life together which transcends the differences of blood relationships, language and religion, and willingly accept the experience of sharing our wealth and cultures, while respecting our diversity.

We have chosen to live together in one sovereign country, a true federation, conceived as a constitutional monarchy and founded on democratic principles.

Faithful to our history, and united by a common desire to give new life and strength to our federation, we are resolved to create together a new Constitution which:

shall be conceived and adopted in Canada,

shall reaffirm the official status of the French and English languages in Canada, and the diversity of cultures within Canadian society,

shall enshrine our fundamental freedoms, our basic civil, human and language rights, including the right to be educated in one's language, French or English, where numbers warrant, and the rights of our native peoples, and shall define the authority of Parliament and of the Legislative Assemblies of our several provinces.

We further declare that our Parliament and provincial legislatures, our various governments and their agencies shall have no other purpose than to strive for the happiness and fulfilment of each and all of us.

● (2030)

Unlike the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) who spoke this afternoon, I do not believe Canada will break up because we have many solid Canadians out there. Let me say to all my colleagues on both sides of the House that storms make oak trees take deeper roots.

Mr. Andre: Unless the woodpecker gets to them.

Mr. Hopkins: After our constitutional provisions are complete, we in Canada will probably have the best oak trees with the deepest roots in the world, united and intertwined together in one closely woven family, because today we are looking at this debate in the middle of conflict. When we look back, it will look quite different to us as we go ahead to full nationhood.

To all people across Canada and to my friends on both sides of the House, there are three lines to a poem written by John Boyle O'Reilly, which I think sum up what should be the aims of each and every one of us in this House and which should be the aim of all Canadians across Canada. In part, the poem reads:

First across the gulf we cast
Kite-borne threads, till lines are passed,
And habit builds the bridge at last!

It is going to be habit in Canada, after we patriate the Constitution and after we have the first ministers' conference, which will hopefully weld this nation together, to build the bridge that will take us on to greater nationhood in years to come.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gary Gurbín (Bruce-Grey): Mr. Speaker, I join the debate on the Constitution with a great deal of respect and humility. I have respect for this as one of the greatest national issues of all time, an issue for which the time has come. I enter the debate with respect for the politicians who have taken part so far. I would like to identify with respect the efforts of members made on behalf of all of us, particularly those who took part in the committee debates. I enter the debate also with respect for this institution of which I am a member and the opportunity and the vehicle it gives us to take part, allowing us to participate in the democratic process.

My humility stems from being a part of this issue which is of such fantastic importance to the future of Canada. I think Canadians must have some feeling of ambivalence about this issue because we have been dealing now for weeks and even months with an issue which, in some ways, lacks a sense of priority in terms of national issues; things such as the economy and all the economic factors making life difficult for people throughout Canada today. Surely they must wonder what we are doing spending the amount of time and effort we are on the Constitutional issue. At the same time, I think each one knows in some vague and unclear way that the constitutional issue and the results which come from our deliberations now will come to play a dramatic role on their futures and the way their lives are conducted in Canada in the future. I think particularly about the province of Ontario.

I want to spend a few moments talking about Ontario's position because I come from Ontario. One of the things that needs to be clear about Ontarians, and about people like myself who try to represent people in Ontario, is that we need to look at this issue in a clear and careful way. We need to look at it with a long view, not with a short, a narrow or a political view. We should take a look at the long-range effects