

The Constitution

Only among Liberals, with their Liberal arrogance, would one find the belief that the Liberals will put God in his right place at the proper time.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Beatty: Senator Austin, when he spoke, said reference to the supremacy of God should come as part of the preamble to the whole of the Constitution; and yet now the Minister of Justice is proposing not that, but that this arid and insipid reference be made at the beginning of the preamble to the charter of rights.

There are many other comments which the Minister of Justice made with which I want to deal very briefly. First, he has recognized that his amending formula was flawed and that improvements should be made because we in committee had pointed out that what the government had done was to grade Canadians on the basis of their province of residence. Then, based on which province one lived in as a Canadian there would be first-class Canadians, second-class Canadians and third-class Canadians.

What the government has done with the amendment it put before the House today is to state that instead of first-class, second-class and third-class Canadians, we will have only first-class and second-class Canadians. It says that the third-class of citizens would be dropped, making those Canadians now into second-class citizens, and the government believes that this should win the support of the official opposition and the support of the millions of Canadians who will be put in this secondary position. We reject that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: We believe that the concession which was made by the government was no concession at all.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: The minister went on in his sarcastic way at quite some length to suggest that one would have a situation where we could have no amending formula, that we would have patriated the constitution, and there would be no amending formula because it would be necessary to have six or seven provinces agree to it before we would have an amending formula. The only matter he overlooked is that there was a meeting here in Ottawa last week at which eight of the provinces, representing 60 per cent of the population of Canada, agreed upon an amending formula.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: So, there is agreement. It is a bogeyman he is trying to raise to scare Canadians, to try to discredit the proposals we have made and the amendment before the House today.

An hon. Member: Dishonest!

Mr. Beatty: But ministers of the Crown and all members in this debate have a responsibility to deal fairly and factually with Canadians and not to present proposals—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: What we heard last week, when the Minister of Justice called a press conference to denounce the proposals made by the premiers, even before the ink was dry on the premiers' signatures, was that what the Minister of Justice and the Prime Minister want is not agreement on an amending formula, because agreement, we know, can be reached, but what they want is agreement on their amending formula. They want not to have co-operation, not to have consensus, not to have compromise; but rather, they want to put a unilateral demand before the provinces that either the provinces accept their amending formula, or else they will impose their prized amending formula using this colonial device of going to Great Britain to have changes made there which should be made here in Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: When we started this whole exercise, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice said it was humiliating for Canadians to have to go back to Great Britain to have substantive amendments made to our Constitution, and this was the reason why it was essential to act today, that we wanted—as the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice have said so often—to remove this last vestige of colonialism, that it was disgraceful, distasteful, and humiliating for Canadians to have to go to Great Britain to have changes made. Indeed, what we saw was a play acted out by the Leader of the NDP (Mr. Broadbent) and by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacGuigan) in which they tried to construct the belief in the minds of Canadians that there had been deliberate interference by the British High Commissioner in an attempt to meddle in Canadian affairs, and that here we had signs of British imperialism. So this was to be ended. We were to bring the Constitution home, because no longer should Canada, as a sovereign nation, have the power to amend our Constitution resident in Westminster. However, when the Gallup Polls showed that 64 per cent of the Canadian people just wanted to follow a procedure according to which would bring the Constitution home and amend it here, and when our party proposed that and when the premiers proposed that, what did the government say? It said, "Well, we aren't sure that the Constitution would be amended in the way that we want, if we were to do that". If all that we were to do were to ask Britain to patriate our Constitution with an agreed upon amending formula, as the Canadian people said they wanted, then it said, "We will never have a charter of rights", and so the story changed.

Now what we have is that the government will go to Britain, it will use these colonial ties one last time to make the amendments that it wants over the opposition of 64 per cent of the Canadian people and eight of the ten provinces. The government will write it into law, and then will sever this tie