

*Constitution of Canada*

and all the rest of it. However, that is a matter we may discuss later.

But I say too, Mr. Speaker, that three years ago when I again discussed this matter in the House I felt that the rigidity of the then Minister of Justice who has now become the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), and his exceedingly narrow and overly legalistic approach to constitutional issues, would likely provoke similar sentiments amongst the provinces, and any meaningful consensus was not likely to be achieved. The facts have borne out this view. There have been a number of meetings of the first ministers. There have been committee meetings with all kinds of media coverage. There has been a pouring out of papers, position papers, provincial statements, federal statements, committee reports, but virtually nothing in terms of real achievement.

The government and the Prime Minister through a very dull and pedestrian approach have managed to throw a smokescreen of boredom around the subject and have really turned the people off. I suppose what the Prime Minister is saying to the simple folks around Camelot is, "Go home and leave this to me and all the other knights around the Round Table."

The thrust of the discussion has been directed above the heads of the people, perhaps deliberately in the expectation that they would not see what was really involved, that 11 sets of hands were tightly gripped about the levers of power and none had any intention of releasing any of them. Only if Canadians as a whole can be made to realize the issues, and to understand that there are some very simple but exceedingly important decisions to be made, can we get anywhere. At the present time it is too much like the discussion that Alice had with the Cheshire cat when they agreed between them that she was walking somewhere, that she did not know where she came from or where she was going but that if she kept on walking she would get somewhere. I feel that this is the case with these federal-provincial conferences.

Should the ultimate decision on issues such as pollution be left to the provincial governments or to the federal government? Should the federal government take some greater and more meaningful roles in the problems of the great cities, such as housing and transportation? This could be applied also to consumers' interests, and there are other areas. An active parliamentary committee set in motion some three years ago, reasonably free from political rancour, could have set out these issues in a simple way and developed an awareness which might well have led to public pressure to compel the men in the various establishments who play the power game to adjust the constitution to the realities of today. I am not talking about a new constitution; I am talking about those necessary and essential decisions made to conform with what we have found from our experience needs to be done today.

● (12:00 noon)

But at present there is a general nausea at the artificial mixture of mystique and mugwumpery which surrounds these constitutional discussions and which persuades too

[Mr. Baldwin.]

many people now that reform or change is only a big yawn. I doubt very much now whether anyone can change this fact of life, but I am willing to go along and give the benefit of the doubt to the committee to be re-established for this session. We must make sure that we exhaust any doubt on this issue with respect to this committee which is to be re-established. We must seek the opportunity to make the people of Canada aware in the simplest possible way of the issues which face us.

Having said that, and my colleagues may have something more to say about details, I wish to say that the debate on this motion presents the first proper occasion on which to record publicly our concern about the operation of the committees of this House. We are debating a motion to re-establish a committee and I am entitled to say at this time that we have some very serious reservations, which we expressed to Your Honour during the last session. Your Honour was good enough to indicate that this is a matter which the procedure committee might well examine. It has now been clearly established that this government with its tractable backbenchers has shown a determination to relegate Parliament, certainly this House, to a position of futility and impotence. Our experience of the last two sessions has made it crystal clear that the new committee system, which was intended to help to prop up the House of Commons as a forum for free men in a free society so that legislation passed would in fact be laws devised and adopted by the people through their representatives, has failed to achieve this purpose. These committees have now become in certain respects a means whereby the Prime Minister, the cabinet and their colleagues and lesser luminaries are de-emphasizing and undercutting the value of the House of Commons. The records of the committees themselves and the complaints made in the House during the last session bristle with illustrations of this fact.

Just two days ago the Prime Minister, in a confrontation with the press about the supremacy of the elected representatives of the people, had something to say on this score. Just whom did he think he was fooling? His scorn of the House and the parliamentary system is too obvious and well documented to need elaboration here, and the government's abuse of the parliamentary committee system is just another example.

Today there is fear, anger, despair and anxiety in this country. Violence stalks this land, as it does the United States of America—so much so that the United States Congress is now in the process of passing an extremely severe measure dealing with law and order. There are indications, if I may be permitted to say so, that the government is contemplating acting under the War Measures Act or bringing in some substitute for it. I am all for order and would support reasonable proposals, Mr. Speaker, but order under the law and not above it. And we must have law or laws passed by this House and Parliament and not produced at the whim of any one man or group of men, no matter how eminent they may be.

Surely one of the contributing factors to some of our troubles has been the fact that many, and this applies