

The Constitution

head of state. When Members of Parliament take their oaths, I remind them that they affirm fidelity and allegiance to the monarchy; otherwise, they cannot take their seats in this chamber. In 1931 under the Statute of Westminster Canadians chose to retain the monarchy. In other words, Canadians wanted to retain the constitutional monarchical system of government and to be members of the Commonwealth of Nations.

The Constitution is no ordinary law. It is a fundamental document respecting our nationhood. It must serve not only the needs of today but also serve the needs of our children. Because the Constitution is so fundamental to this nation, it should not be arbitrarily imposed by any one individual or government. The Constitution should be brought home so that we Canadians can change it here for ourselves.

The position of the Conservative Party on the Constitution reflects the will of the Canadian people. After all, it was our party under the leadership of the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker which gave Canadians their first charter of rights.

Some hon. Members: Time.

Mr. Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I will close, if my time is up, by saying to the backbenchers on the opposite side that it only takes 20 of them to tell the Prime Minister they will vote against his unilateral patriation of the Constitution unless he calls the provincial premiers together one more time to seek unanimity on an amending formula and a charter of rights acceptable to all in this House; in short, a co-operative federalist country with the greatest future in the free world.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bill Vankoughnet (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents of Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington in this Canadian constitutional debate.

As a nation Canada may not have achieved all it might, but when we look about, we see that conditions could have been much worse. That is why I am concerned about the present government's attitude regarding unilateral change. Change leads to further change, and anyone who thinks the proposed changes being espoused are timeless is only fooling himself. However, change is inevitable and, if done properly and in an orderly manner, will be respected, even if not agreed to by all.

As a nation of nearly 114 years we have seen what looked like disastrous events at certain times, but as time passes we have found they were only incidents in the development of our nation. The unknown in this great country which holds so much promise is of concern to me. Our way of life, to a considerable extent, is new in human history. Under our present system of government we have moved toward eliminating poverty, and we have cut down illness to a degree which has not been seen elsewhere. We have spread opportunity for education throughout the country. We have maintained a high

degree of harmony between freedom and order under the present division of federal and provincial powers.

As a Conservative I take a conservative view of what we are today and what we must do to make the future better. We must take a progressive step in maintaining a spirit of nationalism. I do not believe we can legislate or order the will to continue as a nation. Because of this belief I have taken the view that conservatism is not a rationalization of what exists but a rationalization of what will exist, and I pray that what will exist is a conservative order. One must first make what one is to conserve.

Having respect for the past, because of what our forefathers did and because of what that has enabled us to do, does not mean adopting it and becoming slaves to it; just as we should not change for the sake of change.

Canada has grown out of a wilderness, in a harsh climate, through the heartache of fate and beside powerful neighbours and natural barriers, but under a system of democracy which has served the test of time.

As we look back to our ancestors with very deep gratitude for all their industrious endeavours—the results of which we have inherited—we give them credit for their wisdom in laying the foundation on which we may from time to time revise to meet new challenges. As we try to improve the system they left, we may find ourselves even more appreciative of their foresight in not providing an easy way of changing our system of government.

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The men and women who established this nation in 1867 were brave and wise people. They were not philosophical theorists like Plato who framed his Republic. They were not gifted with second sight to show them that within 114 years the population would increase so much, that our natural resources would be so vast and important to our standard of living, and that transportation by land, water, air and pipeline would revolutionize our way of living. Neither did they know of the electronic communication system which would become commonplace. What they did was to construct, within their scope of knowledge, with a spirit which was idealistic and with hands that were practical, a foundation on which many races and cultures could find firm footing as one united nation known as Canada.

We have reached our present standard of living because of our heritage, which is our past that we put into the present for the purpose of review. From our past we inherited the ethic of hard work, making do with what we had; then by improving it while attending to the business of today and preparing for tomorrow. From our more remote ancestors we have inherited the humanistic spirit of the Greeks and the Renaissance, emphasizing the dignity of men, the Roman and Anglo-Saxon rule of law to provide for peaceful change in our society, and the democratic faith in liberty, God and equality to make it a truly modern nation.

Many contributions have been made to this nation by people fleeing from oppression. Love of our country involves knowing