

The Address—Mr. Breton

2. Right for the parliament of Canada to amend the constitution with respect to matters coming under its exclusive authority.

3. Consultation with the provinces for possible amendment of those matters involving both authorities.

This classification of the problems to be considered was adopted by the federal-provincial conferences and will probably lead to the settlement of the constitutional problem, by reducing, point by point, the causes of misunderstanding in so far as jurisdiction is concerned.

It may be said that one of the major barriers to constitutional reform has already been removed, for it is the unanimous wish of all the parties to this future agreement to safeguard provincial particularities in the matter of education, of language and of religion. This defence of certain essential rights is, in any event, greatly facilitated by a tradition of liberty and tolerance which is altogether in keeping with our democratic aspirations.

I am convinced that each and every member of this house will agree that Canada must not only have a constitution worthy of its political maturity, but that it must also possess legislative powers that will enable it, from time to time, to adopt, notwithstanding provincial particularities, social laws nationwide in their scope.

While I am on the subject of social security, I believe I may be allowed to state that, to my mind, it is nonsensical that problems of national health, of unemployment, of help to the disabled or the unfortunate of all kinds,—in other words problems of life itself,—should be so hard to solve because of legal difficulties or jurisdictional disputes. Allow me to express the hope that the future Canadian constitution will be flexible enough to enable all parties concerned to adopt, through both federal and provincial legislation, all the appropriate measures to help those who suffer and who, if they received no help, would bring shame on a nation such as ours which has been so greatly favoured by Providence.

During the last federal-provincial conference, held here in Ottawa last December, the representatives of the federal government set out proposals to grant the old age pension, without the means test, to all persons over seventy, and to lower the age limit to sixty-five for the needy, in accordance with the recommendations submitted by the joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate on old age security.

The conference delegates deserve congratulations for bringing up this point, which is one of the urgent requirements of the debate on the revision of our constitution, that is the need for enlarging the scope of social security in order that the poor may take better advantage of it.

If I stress the importance of social security, it is because ever since I had the honour of being chosen to represent a riding in the House of Commons, I have met—and all members of this house have surely had the same experience—a great many needy and disabled persons, as well as poor widows and sick people who were unable to pay for medical care.

I am convinced that no man in political life who has his duty at heart would remain unconcerned in the face of such a social evil. Businessmen cannot ignore so distressing a social condition. As for us, who are here to draft bills for the benefit of the Canadian people as a whole, we cannot overlook so important a matter.

I recall these things not because I wish to be critical of what has been done up to now to alleviate suffering in our country. Tracing back the history of our social legislation for the past 30 or 40 years, we find that considerable progress has been made.

The magnificent outline given in Vancouver, on June 12 last, by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin), of the work already done, is sufficient indication that politicians have considered the problem and endeavoured to solve it. This interest in social welfare has been reflected, these past few years, in various acts which have increased the amount voted for this purpose by one billion dollars. Indeed, while in 1913 our various governments spent a total of \$15 million for social welfare purposes, today the federal and provincial governments are spending more than a billion.

I need not recall that the main architect of social security in our country was the late Right Hon. Mackenzie King.

I need not remind members of this house the attitude of the present Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) on this matter. Is he not the one who not long ago most appropriately said:

We shall not be satisfied until we have attained on a national scale, and with the co-operation of the provincial governments, a degree of social security and human welfare that will ensure to all Canadians the greatest possible measure of social justice.