

Dominion-Provincial Conference

through our committee, work out a real contribution to our country's constitutional problems, I wonder who can. Where can those problems be worked out? It is wrong to say you could work out problems in watertight compartments, or in caucus only. Of course, you could tackle it that way, but we think that those discussions should take place here, where members of our committee could make constructive suggestions. I am not saying we must agree with each other; it is unlikely that we shall agree. But I am sure that if we disagree, as we are bound to, we shall disagree on a higher level, as it were, than others in this country could. We could disagree having available to us a great deal of knowledge which may not be available to others.

Confederation was forged by ordinary, elected members, similar to those in this chamber. They were the ones, and not the academics, the scholars, civil servants or bureaucrats in the London colonial office, who worked out our constitution. It is our job, whether we are in opposition or in government, to contribute to this process of constitution making. I therefore hope the government will set up the committee as quickly as possible and give it a large measure of responsibility in this matter.

Mr. Stan Schumacher (Palliser): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate on our nation's constitution. I was surprised and disappointed to hear the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) say that he did not think the position of the party to which I have the honour to belong in respect of the monarchy was clear. I submit he cannot point to a single policy of this party that would have the effect of removing or weakening that institution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schumacher: This position can be contrasted with the actions of his government in downgrading the monarchy at every opportunity. For example, I am referring to matters such as omitting all reference to the monarchy in the throne speech, stopping ceremonial salutes to the royal family and to the Prime Minister's statement that he does not believe in attacking symbols important to other people. What other meaning can be attached to that statement than that the symbols of the monarchy are completely unimportant to him.

With respect to the Prime Minister's comment about two nations, I wonder whether he has now forgotten ordering the withdrawal of

a Liberal party advertisement at Calgary, an advertisement which accused this party of supporting a two nation policy. That was last June.

● (4:50 p.m.)

The first point that springs to my mind in this debate has to do with the procedure for amending our constitution. Over the past several years there has been a great deal of effort spent on attempting to arrive at a method of changing our constitution. In spite of all this effort, no agreement has been reached. Surely, the basic ingredient of any constitution, if it is to be a living document, is an amending procedure. Until this problem is solved, how are we going to achieve a new constitution even if all other points are agreed upon? Surely, no one would be so short-sighted as to accept a constitution which, no matter how perfect it might be now, would be frozen forever more?

My second point is whether what the nation witnessed earlier this week was not just so much window dressing, or a vehicle to titillate the Prime Minister's (Mr. Trudeau) academic propensities. In other words, to put it bluntly, do we really need a new constitution?

Our constitution is the product of several hundreds of years of experience and I submit should only be dismantled or changed with care. The present debate in the country on the subject of our constitution seems to be based to a large extent on the principle that it should be changed for the sake of change, and that after we change the constitution many of our problems will be solved. As a result, a great many expectations have been raised which cannot be satisfied by a new constitution, even if it were written by that person often referred to by the Prime Minister as the "Holy Ghost" himself. To my mind, the Prime Minister is using this entire constitutional question as a smokescreen to cover his government's lack of executive action in meeting the real problems of today.

No one has successfully demonstrated, as far as I am concerned, that the present constitution is holding up social advances. I would like someone to name one social change that could not be achieved because of our present constitution. It is also well to remember that this country fought two world wars and a world depression which resulted in vast social changes under our present constitution. How can it be said to be inflexible?

In this connection, during World War II the provinces turned over their entire tax