

## The Observance of Constitution Day

Unsparring efforts were put forth by the National Security League, the National Association for Constitutional Government, and the other associated patriotic societies to bring about, everywhere in the United States, a public celebration of September seventeenth as "Constitution Day." It is cause for sincere rejoicing that these efforts were crowned with a brilliant and remarkable success. In a season of world-wide upheaval, when the torch of anarchy is aflame and the foundations of all just government are threatened, it is of good omen that several millions of American citizens should have joined in testifying to their continued devotion to that great instrument which has made our land the home of justice, order, and liberty.

Preparations for the observance of Constitution Day were admirably conducted by a very notable committee of eminent citizens, with the assistance of an honorary committee which included in its membership the governors of twenty-two states, the mayors of over one hundred large cities, the heads of state departments of education and of state bar associations, and many others, and with the aid of local committees in practically all of the states, as well as the Philippines, Porto Rico, and Alaska. As soon as plans were definitely announced, the movement received the enthusiastic support of the most distinguished leaders of American life and thought. Cardinal Gibbons gave it his unqualified approval. General Pershing wrote: "In the name of the officers and men of the American Expedition-

ary Forces who fought in Europe to maintain the rights of freedom and justice for all the world, I extend you sincere congratulations on your movement to celebrate the anniversary of the signing of the greatest bill of human rights since the Magna Charta. Our country is no longer in the throes of war, but the state of unrest which disturbs the citizens of all nations at the present time makes it of high importance that the minds of our people should be turned to solemn contemplation of the bulwark on which their future peace, happiness, and prosperity rest, the Constitution of the United States."

This was indeed the whole purpose of the movement. It was a campaign of education. It rested upon the belief that the best and perhaps the only antidote for the poison of radicalism, sovietism, and general dispraise of our institutions is a knowledge and understanding by all the people, both native and foreign born, of the American ideals of human liberty and representative government embodied in the Constitution. It was an assertion of law and order, a superb gesture against the reds. It was in this sense that it received the indorsement of the American Bar Association, whose special committee recorded its "heartly approval of the purpose of that celebration. The Constitution, which provides a plan of government for the enforcement of the rights proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence, is of equal value with the incomparable Declaration itself. Both documents should be well known

by all American citizens. Any plan leading to a better knowledge, particularly of the rights and benefits of the Constitution, should meet the approval of all good citizens, and especially lawyers."

The governors of twenty states issued official proclamations designating September 17th as Constitution Day, and urging the people of their states to unite in public meetings and demonstrations in honor of the Constitution. One of the best of these proclamations was that issued by Governor Allen of Kansas. It said: "September 17, 1919, is the one hundred and thirty-second anniversary of the adoption of the United States Constitution by the constitutional convention. Under that Constitution and its amendments, every man has had a chance, our people have been educated, women have been respected and honored, God has been freely worshiped, right has been placed above might, and our country has developed into a powerful and influential nation that is loved and respected by all the world. The United States Constitution, with us, means an opportunity for each, protection for all, justice for every one, and liberty, both civil and religious, for the strong and weak, and for the rich and poor. Other nations have used it as a model in drafting subsequent constitutions, and by it have been inspired with the hope that they can do what the United States has done. Its principles are not understood by all our people. It should be studied more carefully, and we should better understand what it is and what it means to us. I therefore designate Wednesday, September 17, 1919, as

Constitution Day, in the State of Kansas, and I request that each community in the state observe the day by assembling in meeting places and discussing the Constitution and listening to speeches about it. I also request that especial attention be given to it in the public schools during that week. I further request that all pastors, on the Sunday preceding or following September 17, preach to their congregations on the Constitution and religious liberty." In a proclamation having the same purpose, Governor Smith of New York said: "I know that the citizens of this state will welcome the opportunity of demonstrating their love of country by participating in the nation-wide celebration of the signing of the Federal Constitution. The United States, to real thinking people, is synonymous with liberty, and a better understanding of our Constitution, which gives us the enjoyment of that right, will assure us of progressiveness and better prepare us to solve properly, in the interest of the people, those important problems which confront us at this time. Now, therefore, I, Alfred E. Smith, Governor of the State of New York, do hereby designate Wednesday, September seventeenth, as Constitution Day, and request the citizens of this state to enter whole-heartedly into the celebration which has for its object the strengthening of the people's faith in our form of government."

The minds of the people having been prepared by the very extensive circulation of pamphlets and other literature explaining the movement and its immense significance and importance, by special exercises in the public schools,

and by instructive sermons from thousands of pulpits, the actual celebration of Constitution Day took the form of well-attended mass meetings in the cities and towns, at which specially qualified speakers, many of them men of national reputation, delivered addresses upon the history and meaning of the Constitution, its value to American citizens, and the urgent necessity of defending it against all its enemies and detractors, both open and covert. Among the greatest and most noteworthy of these meetings were that in New York, at which Elihu Root presided and the principal address was given by Job E. Hedges; that in Chicago, under the auspices of Governor Frank O. Lowden; that in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, addressed by James M. Beck; that in Faneuil Hall,

Boston, addressed by David Jayne Hill; and that in St. Paul, which listened to an eloquent address by Nicholas Murray Butler. Though exact statistics are not at hand, it is entirely safe to say that more than twenty thousand meetings in celebration of Constitution Day were held within the United States. If the average attendance was no more than five hundred persons, that would mean that, on that day, ten millions of our people renewed their allegiance to the Constitution, were instructed as to its transcendent merits, and recorded their purpose to uphold it against all assaults. This gives ground for encouragement and fresh inspiration in the fight against the forces of disruption. It was more than a demonstration; it was a triumph.

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