PS1 for 1/8/87#PLOTTING TO REWRITE THE CONSTITUTION

An unreported meeting of about 30 persons took place at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. on December 5 where some serious-minded movers and shakers plotted to rewrite the U.S. Constitution. A feeling of quiet arrogance pervaded the discussions; clearly this little group sees itself as men with the vision and talents of James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and the other framers of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia 200 years ago.

Who are these people? One speaker admitted that they are known as ""the parliamentary government group,'' and indeed that is the purpose that brings them together. The name of the group is the Committee on the Constitutional System (CCS), and its aim is to change the structure of the U.S. Government into a European parliamentary system.

The working paper of the Mayflower meeting, on which the majority agreed, calls for the following constitutional changes:

1) The CCS wants four-year terms for House members and eight-year terms for Senators, with Federal elections only every four years. This would eliminate the mid-term elections, along with our government officials' biennial worry that the voters might turn them out of office.

2) The CCS wants to permit members of Congress to serve in the Cabinet, something which the U.S. Constitution now bars. Arguing that this would bring ""closer collaboration'' between the branches of government, this proposal would, of course, violate our separation of powers principle.

3) The CCS wants to eliminate the requirement that treaties are not valid unless two-thirds of the Senators agree, and instead to require approval by only a majority of both Houses of Congress. CCS's president, Lloyd Cutler, who was Jimmy Carter's adviser on SALT II, is still smarting from the failure of the Senate to ratify that treaty.

4) The CCS wants to limit drastically the amounts of money that can be spent on Congressional and Senatorial campaigns in order to reduce the

influence of ""interest group contributions.'' Translated, that means to increase the influence of Establishment-type interest groups such as CCS.

5) The CCS wants the President to be able to dissolve Congress and call new elections, and for the Congress to be able to get rid of a President with less difficulty than it took in Watergate. CCS hasn't yet reached a consensus on the most practical way to achieve this goal.

6) The CCS wants to call a ""special convocation'' to re-allocate the division of powers among Federal, state and local governments. The goal is to take control over the cities away from state governments and give control to the Federal Government.

The CCS has been playing around with these radical ideas for about ten years, and they recognize that they will be very difficult to sell to the American people. So, CCS has recently come up with an intermediate plan to facilitate acceptance of these goals.

The CCS wants to increase the power of the hierarchy of political parties. If legislative decisions can be made by a handful of people at the top, and then party discipline imposed, the task of converting the United States to a parliamentary system would become easier.

1) The CCS wants to require Presidential nominating conventions to give uncommitted voting delegate positions to all incumbent Senators and to all party nominees for the Senate and House. This would give Congress a big voice in choosing the presidential nominee of each political party.

2) The CCS wants to require all states to allow straight-ticket voting for all Federal offices. This is to discourage split-ticket voting.

3) The CCS wants to require all broadcast advertising funds expended for Senate and House campaigns to come from taxpayer financing, one-half of which would be totally at the discretion of the two political parties. This would eliminate individual campaign contributions through Political Action Committees, and would require candidates to look to their party hierarchy for half of their funding, thereby allowing political party chiefs to exert discipline over candidates.

4) The CCS wants Congressional party caucuses to be given additional powers through stronger rules in order to formulate party positions and impose party discipline.

The Committee for the Constitutional System is not a fly-by-night group; it contains many big names such as former Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon, former World Bank president Robert S. McNamara, and many internationalists such as former Senator J. William Fulbright. The Mayflower meeting made it clear that they plan to use the forthcoming Bicentennial celebrations to promote radical changes in the U.S. Constitution.