

Canadian Flag

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: I think therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is fair for me to say that of the 15 members of that committee 11 support the recommendations of this report.

Mr. Rapp: That could be, but the vote never occurred that way.

Mr. Pearson: I quite agree that the vote was 10 to 4, because the chairman did not vote. Normally the chairman would only vote if there was a tie and he was required to break that tie. Mr. Speaker, when the three maple leaves design was before this house the right hon. Leader of the Opposition referred to it in the following terms: "I have seen better trademarks."

Mr. Diefenbaker: That is right.

Mr. Pearson: Unfortunately there has been a great deal of depreciation and sneering about the maple leaf as an emblem on a flag. I do not understand why hon. members opposite take that attitude toward this symbolism of Canadianism. I suggest it is unfortunate that the impression has been created in certain areas and quarters that the maple leaf is not worthy of being a national symbol of Canada on a flag, and I hope that when the dust of the debate has cleared away, if this recommendation carries, we will all be proud of the fact that the central feature of our flag is a red maple leaf.

The next criticism that has been levelled at us on this side is that if it is not the Pearson pennant, as it used to be called, it is somehow or other a flag design put forward to appeal to only one section of our population. It has been suggested time after time since last June, in speeches made by members on the other side and in statements made outside this house, that this has been done by the government, and now presumably by the committee, as the result of some kind of deal with one part of Canada—with Quebec—and that somehow this is Quebec's flag. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be more malevolently designed to stir up division and controversy in this country. It is untrue and it is unworthy.

Mr. Caouette: Dishonest.

Mr. Pearson: And dishonourable; and nothing could be more prejudicial to national unity in our country at this difficult time than these anti-Quebec flag and other insinuations. I think I join nearly every member of this house in deploring these divisive and dema-

[Mr. Pearson.]

gogic tactics. To suggest, Mr. Speaker, that to introduce or support a maple leaf flag, whether three maple leaves or a single maple leaf, is to surrender to Quebec is an insult not only to our French speaking fellow Canadians but to those English speaking members of this house and English speaking Canadians outside the house who support these proposals—and many do—for the best and the most patriotic Canadian reasons. When this controversy and debate are over I hope we can somehow remove from consideration by parliament the feeling that any one part of Canada is more concerned in this matter than any other part of Canada, because this is a Canadian proposal we are submitting to parliament.

The issue now before the house, Mr. Speaker, is the right of parliament to come to a decision. Arguments have been repeated over and over again in the discussion. Statistics show how many speeches we have had and how many days we have devoted to this discussion. Surely no one inside or outside the house can argue that parliament has not had adequate opportunity to consider this matter in committee and in the house. Of course free and full discussion is absolutely essential to the parliamentary process, but full and free discussion is not the same as obstruction, as the prevention of a decision on a matter after discussion.

We have rules, and we have used them very sparingly. I hope we will never have to use them except very sparingly in emergencies. We have a rule to prevent this kind of thing. It is called closure and it is used practically every week, sometimes nearly every day, in the mother of parliaments at Westminster. Fortunately we have not had to use it very often in this parliament.

An hon. Member: 1956.

Mr. Pearson: Yes, it was used in 1956, and do not ask me to explain or apologize for the way it was used then.

Mr. Diefenbaker: You voted for it.

Mr. Pearson: I voted for it; indeed I did. I voted for it, but let me remind the right hon. gentleman that after what he said about the use of this rule in 1956 and after his commitment to remove this rule from the standing orders, what did he do about closure? I hope he will pardon me for mentioning this but his intervention made it necessary. The rule was retained, Mr. Speaker.