

House of Commons, he knew he was going to speak to the Canadian Legion on the night of May 17, and he knew what he was going to say. He made no reference to it. Honourable senators can refer to the list of priorities, and check them for themselves, for I do not intend to go over the list. A number of those urgent priority items have not seen the light of day since, and a number of others are mouldering on the Order Paper in another place.

Surely no one will argue that there were not more important things for Parliament to do during these past months—and I remind honourable senators of the days and weeks this house recessed because there was no business before it. Surely no one will argue that the Government, which has the responsibility for arranging the business of the house should not have turned its attention, and Parliament's attention, to some of the real problems facing this country.

The economic and social priorities that must be decided upon on a long-term basis by this country have been suspended in mid-air, without decision, while the Government pressed on and on to divert the attention of Parliament and the country to the question of symbols. When there is so much of substance to be considered and resolved, the Government has been preoccupied with symbols. "Symbols instead of substance" will be a fitting epitaph for the present Government, when that epitaph is written in the not-too-distant future.

The Prime Minister has been proclaimed, by himself as well as by his friends, as the great proponent of national unity. Senator Gouin referred to him a few minutes ago. No one questions the Prime Minister's sincerity, but the sad fact is that his judgment is bad, and that his lack of good judgment has caused more disunity in the country than many of us have seen for long years.

The Prime Minister, it is clear, does realize that we have a problem of national unity. To solve this problem, which honourable senators know runs very deeply, the Prime Minister proposes to invent some symbols. In the event the cure will aggravate the disease, and has aggravated it. This policy is one of tokenism on the part of the Government. They think they can bring about unity by displaying the externals of unity. The sad thing is that they are going to be disappointed, as a result of their naivete.

The Prime Minister's predecessors in office, to whom Senator Gouin referred, realized that for any measure in this wide and very sensitive area of national unity there must be a consensus of support in the country. It is the way of compromise and conciliation.

It is one area where government and people must move ahead together. The process has been slow. At times it has been painful. I know and appreciate the fact that it has also been frustrating, especially at times to our French Canadian fellow citizens in Quebec, who on some measures would have wished to move much more quickly; but there have been times as well when because of Quebec's insistence on its legitimate prerogatives, its tendency to see invasion of provincial rights where the rest of Canada has seen no such invasion, the developing process has been too slow for English Canada also.

Senator Croll referred to the national anthem. I think I can illustrate what I mean by the necessity of consensus when I say this, looking back 20 years I do not think that there could have been any consensus if a resolution had been introduced in the other place—as I suspect it will be one of these days—declaring "O Canada" as our National Anthem. I think that might well have produced the type of disruptive and bitter debate which we have read about as having occurred in another place. I suggest that today that resolution would go through with little or no discussion at all, because by delay and compromise, by dialogue, a consensus has been reached. This necessity for delay and compromise on these emotional issues is the price we all have to pay.

Public opinion in all the provinces of Canada has had to be nurtured and developed slowly on all these issues, for governments of Canada since Confederation, until recently at least, have realized the compelling necessity for a consensus in these areas where unity is involved, before taking any hasty action. Hasty action in these areas is self-defeating; it weakens the very unity we are all trying to accomplish.

It should be clear now, despite the "Croll Poll," if indeed it was not clear before, that there is not a consensus in the country in support of the flag now proposed. On the contrary, there is a deep division.

Only the other day we read in the Ottawa papers of the organizations and individuals in this very city, who stated that they will not fly the proposed new flag. Let me hasten to say that I do not agree with that sentiment. When the Parliament of Canada has decided on a distinctive flag, I will respect it as the flag of my country. I mention these reports merely to show the depth of the emotion and the area of disunity which some people brush aside very lightly. Surely this is no way to herald the advent of a flag that must stand for Canada in the future; but that is the position in which the Government has tried to place us.