

Canadian Flag

a change that denies our past requires a degree of national agreement. I do not say unanimity, but I do say the intangible element of the spirit of all Canadians, a national unity determined by the proof of national identity.

There is in all our hearts deep and abiding Canadianism. Canadians think of themselves as Canadians and as nothing else. I do. My people come from two races but I think of myself as a Canadian; and always, from my earliest days in this house, I advocated a Canadianism unhyphenated while fully recognizing the constitutional rights under our constitution and the British North America Act.

You cannot force a flag on the people of Canada and secure from them that mystic something which some ridicule as nationalism—the patriotism of men and women who love their country. A flag design is not a trick by which one group imposes upon others some evidence of a Canadianism that all will not accept.

I have admitted that for many years there has been a sentiment for a distinctive flag. I have shown that a distinctive flag is now being defined as it never was in the past—as one which denies Canada's past. It is a strange thing that we are being asked, and in haste, to reverse the past, to accept the design of the Prime Minister which he unveiled at 24 Sussex street to a selected audience, before parliament had it. The desire for a flag is one thing; agreement on a design is another.

There have been many suggestions. I have received many outstanding ones. I should have thought that instead of saying to parliament, "This you do, or parliament will face the consequences" some other course would have been followed. This is not the way, in a spirit of Canadianism, of toleration, of understanding, in which a thing like this is brought about. A flag is not something which can be ordered by parliament. A flag must be something to evoke the emotions of the heart, a rallying point for the finer sentiments of the people joined together in a nation. We have come to agreement on many things throughout the years. After all, surely there is not such a rush. Surely we do not set a zero hour for the determination of something which the Prime Minister says will be ours always? That is the finality which he places on a design chosen by himself and preferred by him.

Mr. Grégoire: Well, you had five years in which to do it.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Cannot we, in the spirit of unity in this country—not with one group or another trying to press the crown of intolerance on any part of the country—cannot we bring about something which will represent Canada? This is the opportunity for the Prime Minister to rise to statesmanship, to depart from the course of partisan extremism—

An hon. Member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I see that the main derisive applause comes from those who would separate this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

[Translation]

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege.

[Text]

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are only a few minutes remaining and I understand the Leader of the Opposition may not be here tomorrow. He should be entitled to those few minutes.

Mr. Caouette: A question of privilege.

Some hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I therefore suggest a national referendum—

Mr. Caouette: A question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker: I would ask the hon. member for Villeneuve (Mr. Caouette) to allow the Leader of the Opposition to finish his discourse.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, surely the question of privilege must be heard—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I have the floor. The Prime Minister cannot interrupt me. This is exactly the trick he has tried to play before. I want to move my amendment.

Mr. Speaker: Under the rules of the house I must interrupt the proceedings and listen to the question of privilege.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I wish to move my amendment—that all the words after "that"—

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps by unanimous consent we would be able to extend the time a little further.

Mr. Pickersgill: We agree.