

Canadian Flag

There are times when I sit in the back bench, listening to great Canadians participating in debate, that I become very conscious of my heritage. I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that there are great Canadians in this house; such great Canadians as the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson), the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker), Mr. Douglas, Mr. Knowles, Mr. Flemming (Victoria-Carleton), Mr. Martin and so many other memorable people who have dedicated their lives to Canada through the medium of elected office. I suppose I am not alone, gentlemen, when I think back to the great men who by their words have sanctified this chamber; the almost legendary figures of Canadian history, speaking in a time when public speaking was a way of life—men like Brown, Cartier, Laurier, Macdonald, Lapointe, Bennett, D'Arcy McGee and Chubby Power. It is little wonder then, gentlemen, that in participating in this historic debate I am very conscious of my limitations.

But, Mr. Speaker, despite those limitations I cannot visualize one member of this house, regardless of his political beliefs, regardless of whether he is for the new flag or the red ensign or the union jack, whether he wants or does not want a referendum, participating in this debate unless he is motivated by sincerity and honesty both to himself and to the people whom he represents. Perhaps I think too highly of this place. Certainly it has its critics. Certainly there are moments, even in this debate, when in the eyes of the press and the people in the galleries we do not conduct ourselves in a manner befitting our high office. But, Mr. Speaker, it is to the everlasting credit of this house that with very few exceptions our conduct has stood the test of time. Our way of life has made it possible for parliament to render its decisions with dignity and sincerity and with an honesty that is unequalled in any other country in the world.

I should hope that when this debate is over, when the new flag is accepted or rejected, whether we have a referendum or whether we do not, all of us without exception can look back and say; that we have conducted ourselves with dignity, that we voted honestly for what we thought to be in the best interests of Canada and Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mackasey: For myself, Mr. Speaker, I represent 90,000 Canadians residing in Quebec's third largest city, the proud city of Verdun; and knowing this community as I do, my political instincts—which, incidentally,

have served me well in the past both in civic and federal life—have suggested that possibly I should refrain from participating in this debate. At first glance this would be the prudent thing to do; but the Irish, gentlemen, even those of us born in Canada, are not known for their timidity or for their prudence.

My riding has strong ties with Great Britain and France. The residents of Verdun are almost equally divided amongst those who claim French as their mother tongue, and those who claim English. One might think at first glance that in voting now for the red ensign I would alienate my French speaking friends, or in voting for the new flag I might be rejecting the English. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, practically all the English speaking peoples in Verdun originate from the British Isles, and our community is proud of the fact that thousands of people from Newfoundland, long before that province became part of Canada, migrated to and still live in the city of Verdun. These are a proud people who brought with them a great love of the union jack, of history and of the British Isles. So it is only natural that I did some soul searching before coming to a decision both on the referendum and on the flag. I thought, Mr. Speaker, of the fact that Verdun in the first world war sent more volunteers overseas than any community of similar size in Canada. I remembered too our equally impressive record in the second war and the fact that Buzz Beurling, a great war hero, was brought up in the city of Verdun. I am vividly aware of the presence of two fine Legion branches in my community, endorsers of the red ensign, branches which remember Canada's history in a manner that should be the rule rather than the exception. Our older branch annually celebrates the battle of Ypres with a military parade second to none in Canada; a parade designed not to glorify war but to point out war's futility; a parade in which our hospitalized veterans are not forgotten. Our second Legion, branch 202, recognizes Dominion day in a manner almost extinct now in Canada—a return to the days when the simple things of life were important, to a field day complete with foot races, fireworks and family participation.

Despite these strong ties with Great Britain, Mr. Speaker, and remembering too our glorious war record and the contribution which the city of Verdun has made to Canada, I must when the time comes vote for the new distinctive Canadian flag so eloquently introduced into this house by a man who must

[Mr. Mackasey.]