

Canadian Flag

the view that the elimination of the symbols which millions of Canadians hold dear is the most important problem facing the government of Canada. I know of no other government in the world that is so confused it believes its most urgent task is the abolition of its national flag.

The government can stop this waste of parliament's time immediately, if it is a waste. They can stop it in various ways. The most obvious way of stopping it would be to accept this amendment and take this divisive subject out of parliament, allowing the Canadian people to make a decision. They could stop this waste of parliament's time, if that is what it is, almost as easily by calling other government business on the next sitting day. The government could have done that 25 days ago. What has happened to the labour code? Why has the government not brought that on? What has happened to the C.N.R. financing legislation and the Canadian pension plan?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sure the hon. member for Queens will agree with the Chair, that he is straying from the motion that is before the house at the present time.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): I am pointing out that by agreeing with this amendment to refer this question to a plebiscite the government will immediately clear the decks of parliament for other business. I am also saying that that is not the only way this could be done. The third way it could be done, if there is no other government business ready at this time, is to accept this amendment and adjourn parliament for the Christmas recess.

Mr. Dupuis: Let us vote and see what happens.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): If the minister will get up and state on behalf of the government that they accept this amendment, then I will—

Mr. Dupuis: This is to be a free vote. I cannot say that for them.

Mr. Herridge: We heard all about the free vote just before lunch.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): The most important point I want to make with regard to all of this, and this is the point that seems to have missed the grasp of the government entirely, is that this is no ordinary piece of legislation. If it were a financial bill, or any kind of legislation which could be corrected, repealed or

[Mr. MacLean (Queens).]

amended by another parliament, I would gladly have someone state the position on behalf of myself and others and let the issue come to a vote. I would be glad to let the government stew in its own juice as a result of its errors.

However, this is a more serious situation than that. There is an old tradition that no parliament can bind a future parliament. However, if we do what the government proposes we will in effect be binding future parliaments, because the flag is something that should be permanent. If this report was concerned only with a flag to fly over Canada during the life of this government I would let it go through immediately, but I have my country's future in mind and at heart, and I think it is shameful if parliament allows this nefarious piece of legislation to be carried out, perpetrating on Canada a permanent flag that millions of Canadians will not accept. A flag is something that cannot practically be changed. Although there may not be anything in the constitution which would prevent a future parliament from changing the flag again, surely we do not want the flag changed every parliament. This government acts as though it were going to be in power forever. There is no telling what the next parliament will be like. It may be entirely different from this one.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): I hear an hon. member from one of the splinter parties, and I agree with the view that he has expressed. I am not suggesting the party to which I belong will necessarily form the next government, because I think the next parliament will probably be more fragmented than this one. One of the reasons for this belief is that the present government has condemned the official opposition with a vitriolic flood of abusive propaganda, but have also condemned themselves by their own acts.

Mr. Herridge: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): I am not surprised that one of the hon. members of the N.D.P. applauds.

I should like to illustrate what I am going to say with a very homely illustration, Mr. Speaker. My contention is that if the government wanted to get on with the other business of the nation now, all it has to do is agree with this amendment. They refuse to do so. They refuse to bring on other government business. They refuse to do what Mackenzie King did in 1946 or 1947—let the