

Canadian Flag

I could quote a great deal more but I will see a copy is sent to the Prime Minister for his private edification.

Mr. Pearson: I would not like to mislead the house, Mr. Speaker. I received no such letter but I did get a letter on my desk. It was addressed "Dear Mr..." blank, and there was no signature to it, but it had that body.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, the attitude of retreat has become almost a regular course. Now, sir, I mentioned the necessity of action being taken to bring about modifications. What are some of the objections that can be raised as against the flag design in this resolution? First, there is the domination of parliament by the executive. We had that during the days of the pipe line. We are having it today on the part of this government, for a few minutes ago the Prime Minister left the impression that in the event that parliament decided on the free vote which he offered, and it was against the particular type of design he placed before parliament, the government would consider itself defeated. Only a few weeks ago he said, "Oh, we will give you a free vote in parliament."

Second, it simply means this, that the government has adopted as its definition of a distinctive flag, any one that does away with the union jack. Well now, why? Australia and New Zealand do not do away with the union jack on their flags. Other parts of the commonwealth do not, but why is Canada taking this lead?

I think that even today South Africa in its flag carries the union jack. As a matter of fact the flag of Hawaii carries the union jack. Why is this removed? Surely Canada deserves something better than having a symbol, the symbol of three maple leaves, effective as a symbol and brought in by a Conservative government under the Right Hon. Arthur Meighen. But a symbol is a long way from a flag which should epitomize something of the past and of the greatness of a country and thereby includes its people in the potentialities of the future.

I believe, as I did when I spoke in this house on February 4, that this matter should have been placed before a conference of the provinces and the dominion, securing their views, not because they would have any authority but because they would bring about a spirit of Canadianism, agreement, and the meaning of Canadianism. We endeavoured to call such a conference together. The scope of

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

the conference would be to study ways and means of repatriating the constitution—

—the problem of adequate representation in the public service, crown corporations and other government agencies; the recommendations in the Therrien report; the choice of a national flag and other symbols of our national sovereignty. In brief, the conference will be asked to examine biculturalism and bilingualism in a comprehensive manner.

That was not followed. We were defeated. A royal commission was set up for the purposes of dealing with Canada's national problems and then suddenly, without having directly at any time pointed out that one of the first things to be done would be to produce a so-called distinctive flag without any commemoration of the country's past, the Prime Minister rushes in to produce the subject matter of this resolution.

Sir, you cannot have a national conference now; but the basic condition of good government is consent, the consent of the governed, in other words, the people. Is there any national determination that we should turn our backs on the past, that we should forget everything that has gone by—

Mr. Grégoire: Ask Balcer.

Mr. Diefenbaker: —and that we should produce something innocuous and insipid.

Why was it that no action was taken following a recommendation of the committee in 1946? I do not know, but I do know that General Crerar, the commander of the first Canadian army in world war II, stated when he was in Ottawa receiving the official welcome of the government of Canada on August 8, 1945, that right hon Mr. King made a statement that is significant of his views, supported as those views were by those of Mr. St. Laurent:

As we moved away from the central entrance of the parliament buildings, Mr. King turned sideways in the car and looked upwards to the peace tower where, at the top, the Canadian red ensign waved. He then said, "And that, General, is another problem which your Canadian army has solved for Canada—the manner of our national flag."

That was his view. As I see it a national flag must bear the history of its country in its fullest. Otherwise it is meaningless. I quote from Barlow in his history:

The study of flags is really the tracing of history by sight.

In other words, it is accepting for those countries newly become nations, great nations, strength and inspiration from the past as they go forward to the future. Sir, to bring about