

Canadian Flag

or two, and I hope hon. members will then realize why I intend to pursue this argument a little further. When I pose my argument this afternoon I would like to point out some of the reasons why I know of so many who are opposed to the new flag, in its present form at least.

First of all, I think it was the Postmaster General who in a speech away from Ottawa, when asked what was his interpretation of the design, pointed out that he understood it to mean that one leaf represented the English, one leaf represented the French, and the third leaf represented the other ethnic groups in Canada. I think we should talk about that for a moment, because we have English and French members in this House of Commons as well as those who belong to other ethnic groups. I happen to belong to one of those ethnic groups; I am of Ukrainian parentage. My grandfather arrived in Canada when he was 17 years old. He married a young lady, years and years ago, who had also emigrated to Canada in her early years.

The press and the Prime Minister have on occasion tried to tell some of us in this house that the ethnic groups in this country desire a new national flag. I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that this representation was never made to me, and I am as close to the ethnic organizations in this country as any other member.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Skoreyko: Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the very suggestion that some day we might be flying a flag which has on it three maple leaves, each leaf representing a different group or faction in this country, will mean that my children and the children of every member in this House of Commons will ask, "I wonder what leaf on that flag I belong to". I think if the government has seriously in mind a national flag that is going to unite this country, we should take another look at the red ensign.

Why not be reasonable and accept the proposal that has been put forward to the Prime Minister? I know he has received this proposal because I have copies of letters that were sent to the Prime Minister of this country which contain specific recommendations in this regard, namely for a slight modification to the red ensign, which would not only please the people who at the moment support the red ensign as it is, but those who support having a new flag, if that is what you want to call it. It would also please those who are

[Mr. Skoreyko.]

indifferent at the moment; and there are a great many people in the country who are completely indifferent to this flag issue.

Let us talk about this new flag. How was it chosen, Mr. Speaker? The leader of our party, Right Hon. John G. Diefenbaker, moved an amendment in the House of Commons which called for a referendum. There is nothing fairer than getting the majority of the people of Canada to decide on the kind of flag they wish to have flown. When we consider this new flag it is very interesting to go through one's files in search of some interesting comments. I have done this, and the first interesting comment I saw was dated May 20. It is an article headed "P.M. told newsmen of flag decision". Well, Mr. Speaker, on May 15 a question was asked in the house as to whether a decision on a new flag had been made, and the answer was in the negative. This article says:

At a few minutes before 6 p.m. last Thursday, eight men—all members of the parliamentary press gallery—left their desks in various parts of town and made their way to the Sussex drive home of Prime Minister Lester Pearson where they had been invited to discuss the issue of Canada's national flag.

The eight, all editors, reporters or magazine writers, were shown into the newly decorated, grey-green living room where the Prime Minister relaxed with a scotch and soda, waiting to try his hand at "kite-flying" or, as some who attended the session called it later, "news management."

This is how this proposed flag came into being. I wonder how many people in Canada are aware of the fact that this new flag was born over a glass of scotch and soda.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Caron: That is cheap enough.

Mr. Skoreyko: That is what the newspaper article says.

Mr. Caron: Well, that is cheap enough.

Mr. Skoreyko: Yes, it is cheap enough; it is a cheap way of introducing a flag into this house. The article continues:

Kiting a news story is a long established political technique. Certain newspapermen are fed information from what they believe is a responsible source, and are encouraged to write it without attribution.

Government or party higher-ups then can judge public reaction and take this into account when they decide to go ahead or withdraw from the course they are considering.

If the Prime Minister had heeded those letters—and I intend to put some of them on the record this afternoon—and the requests of those people who wrote and asked him to withdraw his flag proposal, we would not