

Canadian Flag

would not want my name to go down in history as one who advocated a rigid, uncompromising design for a Canadian flag, and that is why I am proud to have the opportunity to stand up this afternoon and give my views frankly and openly.

Despite the publicity that has been generated from coast to coast about the stand taken by our party on this issue, may I point out we are the party which said "Let there be a compromise". We are the party which said "Let there be a plebiscite". We are the party which said "Let the people of Canada decide". This is our position, and it would be interesting to know what position will be taken by hon. members opposite. Are they more concerned with partisan politics than with the wishes of the people they represent? Are they more concerned with the tally of votes than with the basic principle we are facing today?

I am sure hon. members opposite do not want to find themselves in that position, and I respectfully suggest that a plebiscite gives them an out. If they advocated a plebiscite they would have nothing to be ashamed of and could walk with pride. But how can they justify taking a position which tells the people of this nation "You cannot decide this. We as members of the Canadian government will make your decision for you, and what we decide will be your flag from now on". I do not want to be put in that position, and I fail to see how hon. members opposite could want to either. This is why I find it hard to understand why they do not at once accept the plebiscite proposition. If they did then we could get on with the business of the nation, something which I believe all hon. members want to do. It is as simple as that. Let the people decide.

Mr. Rock: May I ask the hon. gentleman a question? He has suggested that if there is no plebiscite there will be strong feelings among those who support the ensign and those who support a new flag. Is he suggesting that if there is a plebiscite there will be no feelings between groups which adamantly support the red ensign and other groups which support the new flag? Is he suggesting a limit on campaigning in a plebiscite?

Mr. Danforth: If we put this matter into the hands of the people and held a plebiscite, then with the majority of the Canadian people having taken a decision there would be nothing to be gained for political purposes. There would no longer be partisan politics

in the flag issue, something with which the House of Commons is swamped today.

Mr. J. N. Ormiston (Melville): Mr. Speaker, since the debate this afternoon must necessarily centre on the topic of a plebiscite I trust I may be allowed to develop a theme which arises when national symbols are changed without recourse to such a method of doing it.

As most hon. members of the house are aware, I am a supporter of the red ensign as the flag of Canada, and for several sessions I have had a bill on the order paper proposing its official adoption by parliament. But because I and many of my colleagues support that flag we have been accused of jingoism, phony patriotism, extremism, sometimes English colonialism and other times sentimental symbolism, and other diversionary epithets of the new nationalism.

I believe I must repudiate the arguments of those who say it is childish to cherish a symbol of man's aspirations or achievements. A symbol can sum up the best or worst of a man's mind or a man's soul. Symbols are the essence of communication between man and his God. The art and science of symbolism distinguishes man from animal.

Man's alphabets are written symbols; his languages are sound symbols; his religions are rich in symbols; his music, sculptures and paintings are symbols. It has been said of one cathedral raised by man to the greater glory of God that it is "frozen music"; it has been said of another that it is a "nightmare in stone". Symbols attend man's birth, his marriage, his religious, social and other activities as he goes to and from upon the earth; they wait upon his death. By them, he creates; by them, he destroys. Not least of all, they symbolize his political conceptions and his political perversions.

The memory of man will not forget for a very long time to come a certain man who took the symbol of the swastika—a good luck symbol older than ancient India—reversed it and made it a symbol of genocide as a political art. Another man, lesser in evil than he, took the fasces, for 2000 years a symbol of the grandeur of Roman achievement in law and political administration, and perverted it into the obscene symbol of a political mafia.

Only last week members of this house paid tribute to a man who symbolizes for millions of people of diverse tongues and races what we may call the terrible twentieth century in which we live. Our own Prime