

Canadian Flag

going to be one of silence, which is all we have had from them to date?

I wish to take this opportunity to challenge the Prime Minister to carry out at least one of the promises he made to the Canadian electorate during the last election campaign. He promised 60 days of decision and a bold, decisive government. Well, his 60 days of decision were a bitter disappointment to many Canadians; but he can still provide bold, decisive government. I challenge him to stand in his place today, or tomorrow, and free the Commons from the sword of Damocles that is hanging over its head in the threat of a general election if the flag resolution fails to pass.

I challenge him to tell the House of Commons that the vote on the flag resolution will be a free vote, with members in all parties voting as their constituencies and their consciences dictate, without fear of a general election if the flag resolution is turned down. I approve of a plebiscite on this issue and predict that if a plebiscite is held the results will be most surprising to the Liberal party. It is perhaps the only way that Canadians who feel they have been robbed of their right of expression on this issue can have their views properly presented as members of this great nation. The selection of a new flag design could then be a choice made of the people, and I believe the majority view should be accepted. However, Canadians will have had their plebiscite right here in the Commons, through their freely elected representatives, if the Prime Minister would give us a free vote. Should the maple leaf design submitted by the Prime Minister be approved under these conditions, then I am sure Canadians generally will accept—they will be forced to accept—the rule of the majority.

However if it is rejected I hope the Prime Minister will seriously consider the proposal I have put forth for a distinctive national flag, which I believe Canadians generally would accept since it would satisfy every desire of our multiple religious, racial and cultural background, and it would eliminate the confusion and disunity which is created at present by the two flag resolution.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale).

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Some hon. Members: Quack, quack.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate during the past two days, and it seems

to me it is strangely reminiscent of the atmosphere that prevailed on the government side of the house back in 1956. It was a Liberal government in those days, too—during the famous pipe line debate. I was a member of the House of Commons at that time. The situation was different inasmuch as the government of that day had an overwhelming majority and it used that overwhelming majority like a steamroller to subvert the basic rights of parliament. When I rose to speak during that pipe line debate I was received in much the same way as I was received tonight, with cries of "Carried" from the government side of the house—and the government side of the house today is again occupied by the Liberal party. There is a difference, however; it has not the great big steamroller majority that it had back in 1956. But it still seems to be saturated with the spirit of complacency, indifference and arrogance which prevailed during that tragic pipe line debate which brought such disastrous results to the parliament of Canada.

There is something else in the atmosphere of that time which is reminiscent of the atmosphere that prevails tonight. The government backbenchers were dedicated to a conspiracy of silence. The very word parliament means to talk and discuss. Yet the supporters of the government sit in silence, do a little jeering from time to time, shout "carried" from time to time, but make no constructive contribution to this important subject which is not only dividing the parliament of Canada but is also dividing the people of Canada from sea to sea. During the rape of parliament back in 1956 I could not understand how the government backbenchers could sit in silence on that occasion, and neither can I on this occasion when a subject is under discussion that is loaded with emotion and concerns the basic values and ideals, the symbols that are identified with our traditions, with our parliamentary institutions, with freedom and liberty, which are at stake at the present time.

I want to spend the few moments at my disposal tonight discussing the amendment to the Prime Minister's motion. There is a fundamental purpose in the amendment. As has already been indicated, it is to provide an opportunity to the government and the Prime Minister in particular to find a convenient face saving device to get them out of the difficulty into which they have stumbled. I cannot believe that a man with the international background of the present Prime Minister of Canada could have de-