

*Canadian Flag*

they did not regard a distinctive flag as one that would separate us from our past. Indeed, the Secretary of State for External Affairs being the heraldic expert of that day—he has since been replaced by the hon. member for another constituency—said that these are the detailed specifications for the ideal Canadian flag. I am reading from the bottom of page 4 and the top of page 5. It should be easily recognizable and not like any other.

Now, mention was made of the maple leaf this evening. Certainly, in two world wars the maple leaf was generally recognized as Canadian. However, it is interesting to note that in 1915 the state of New York adopted the maple tree as its official tree, representative of the state.

The flag should be visible at a distance. Now, that is an interesting thing. I ask you, how far you are going to be able to see that white flag in winter?

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** As it so happens, that is one of the qualities that is required, and mention was made of that in the evidence given before the parliamentary committee. Hon. gentlemen opposite, therefore, have not even read the records of 1945 and 1946.

The flag should be symbolic of the country and its position as a sovereign state in the family of nations, lending itself to a variation for different purposes.

**Mr. Martin (Essex East):** Why not read 4 and 5 as well?

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** I read all five of them. I simply judge, after reading all five, that what is being produced today in this resolution does not in any way meet the qualifications that were then suggested by the hon. gentleman. The flag is a symbol of unity and not a symbol of the most bitter division in Canada. As this country approaches its one hundredth anniversary, surely the Canadian people should not have forced upon them at the will of a government enjoying whatever support it has through third parties in this house or elsewhere, a flag that is today being criticized so widely. It is no time to play with Canadian unity. It is no time to bring about division within this nation.

What about the circumstances under which it was produced? I understand it was incubated in nine days. What has been happening in the last few months since this government has gone into this field of dominion-provincial relations, national symbols and the like, has been strong blows at unity, driving

wedges between province and province, race and race. Indeed, as a result there has been encouraged a rise in emotions such as has not been seen in this land. Sir, this is why, in discussing this subject one does not wish to do anything to arouse emotional feelings. If the government had calculated a means whereby division could be secured in this nation, they could not have gone about it in a more effective manner.

I sometimes wonder whether what is being done is designed to distract attention, to create a diversion from the confusion and the chaos of the government in so many fields since it took office. I say this, why was not a committee of parliament set up, of both houses, as took place in 1945, when agreement was arrived at? However, for some reason, that recommendation was not carried into effect. Why should there not be some action taken to bring about a flag that is distinctive? This does not mean distinctive, because it has not anything to show the British relationship of this country and its past, or distinctive showing the great contribution during the past of the French period, nothing on it showing the tremendous contributions under British rule such as parliament, the rule of law and freedom. Why are these things to be swept aside—simply because a government believes it has the power? When the Prime Minister indulged in quotations he did not think of bringing to the attention of the house the letter he received from the various intellectuals who signed that message of May 27.

**Mr. Pearson:** Mr. Speaker, I received no such letter.

**Mr. Nowlan:** He did not read it, that is all.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** This is not the first time they have not told him in his office. That letter read:

We believe, as you do, that the flag should be a source of national unity, and that it should be unmistakably Canadian in character. However, we protest that the maple leaf flag is neither of these things. Its only advantage is that it is innocuous, that it produces tepid approval, mild disapproval, or indifference, and that it can therefore be adopted without any display of strong feeling whatever. We have a despairing feeling that this insipid flag, instead of promoting national unity, will produce only an indifferent response, and in doing so will subtly undermine the Canadian will to survive. We believe profoundly that this negative approach to our national symbols erodes our national spirit.