

Canadian Flag

we are dealing with the amendment, which concerns a plebiscite.

Mr. Cowan: I was hoping that some comments I was about to make would provide information to those who will be voting on this question of a plebiscite. As to relevancy, I thought we had wide latitude. I was here the other day and heard the way an admitted draft dodger referred to men who had lost a leg in the first world war, or an arm in the second world war as "resembling Canadians." That apparently was relevant; he was not called to order. Yesterday or the day before I heard a cabinet minister tell an hon. member of this house to sit down and shut up. So I know the latitude accorded to us in this debate is very wide.

On this question of the plebiscite I should like to point out that this editorial of August 22 last says we now have a government led by a man who, one day in May, claims he is discussing a national policy of the utmost importance; yet in the month of August he says it is a free vote and everybody can do as he likes. With a plebiscite it would be a free vote and 19 million Canadians would have an opportunity of telling us what they think.

I have already drawn the attention of the house to the fact that the party in the seats of government does not hold a majority of votes from the electors who put us here. I am the member for York-Humber, with 20,000 votes behind me; I had 24,000 votes cast against me. I hope and pray that I represent a majority of the people in York-Humber. I know I do on the red ensign question, but on other questions of the day I hope and pray that I represent always the majority opinion of the people of York-Humber and not solely the opinion of the minority who put me into parliament with 20,000 votes in a 44,000 vote election.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Cowan: I say we have not a clear mandate to put a flag before the nation on a single vote of parliament; this party does not have 50 per cent of the votes. Two by-elections were held quite recently. It is a sore subject in some quarters and perhaps I do not need to name where they were held, but I would point out that in regard to the vote in those two by-elections—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Churchill: Go ahead.

Mr. Cowan:—the party in power did not receive a majority of the votes; yet we have a spokesman for the Liberal party going down into New Brunswick and announcing that 90 per cent of the people are in favour of the proposed flag. This statement was made within two weeks of the two by-elections in which the party in power did not obtain 50 per cent of the votes. Boy, if that isn't inflation I never did see it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Cowan: They obtained 47 per cent of the vote on November 9, yet it is said that 90 per cent of the people are in favour of the one leaf flag. The same spokesman who was in New Brunswick stating that 90 per cent of the people were in favour of this flag was in Victoria, B.C., in August. As reported by the *Victoria Times* we learn that the question of the flag is settled; everybody is in favour of the three leaf flag. The *Victoria Times* of August 14 says:

There is definitely no chance of a federal election this year and prospects are unlikely in 1965, transport minister J. W. Pickersgill said here today.

The federal cabinet minister pooh-poohed any question that the issue of Canada's new flag could precipitate a vote.

"The public has decided the flag question. It is settled", he said emphatically.

This is the *Victoria Times*. This is the three leaf flag that the member for Leeds loves so much. If the question was settled on August 14, why are we debating the matter in December of 1964, except to force a plebiscite of the people? Let us get the opinions of those people who are the backbone of and who are this country in the last analysis, and let us not have the decisions of people sitting in these seats and sitting here, in a great many cases, with a minority of the votes behind them.

I certainly believe that in a plebiscite, if three or four suggested pennants were before the public, the red ensign would carry an overwhelming majority of the vote; because with a transferable vote only a majority vote can win the day, which is not the case when you put eight or nine flags up for grabs and one gets, say, 31 per cent of the vote and you say therefore that everybody will go for it. If there were a transferable vote of the nation on this question of a pennant you would find that the red ensign would top any such plebiscite that was held.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am well aware that statements have been made that this is going to be a free vote. A free vote is one where the government does not fall if the vote goes