

Canadian Flag

decisions of this kind, and that when the issue is such that people feel very strongly about it, they should be given the opportunity of publicly expressing their views. There are many divergent views in respect of this flag issue, as evidenced by the number of letters members have received. I suggest the only proper way of obtaining an honest view, in order to make a proper decision, is to hold a referendum. I do not think the decision should be made in an atmosphere which suggests that we must now accept the government's choice or hold an election. I feel each member should be able to properly report the facts to the people of his constituency, and I cannot understand how the members can do this in respect of the present feeling of the people of Quebec. Mr. Speaker, I suggest the government should give some explanation of its method of handling this situation.

As I have said earlier, a flag should be a symbol of a country. I favour the red ensign because it is historical and traditional, standing for our democratic heritage, system of law and relationship to the commonwealth. What will a new flag stand for? It will stand for the method by which the government is pushing it down our throats. A new flag will not be familiar to the people, but will be associated with the method of obtaining it, with the feeling of uneasiness in Quebec, and the feeling of resentment towards Quebec generated by this issue. The flag will be associated with a domineering Liberal government which talks about a national symbol at a time when more pressing economic needs should be considered.

Mr. Speaker, how can a national flag stand for that which the Prime Minister says it should when his method of obtaining it can only be associated in the minds of the people of this country with those things to which we have referred? I suggest it can only be associated with an unreasonable approach to this issue, and a complete ignoring of the rights of the other citizens of this country. The voice of the ordinary citizen cannot be heard, and cannot be heard through representation in the House of Commons. Those are the things with which a national flag will be associated after it is obtained in the suggested manner.

I suggest the government take another look at the situation. I suggested earlier that the flag debate should be deferred until the fall. I did not make that suggestion because of any fear that we could not deal with this question. We are losing sight of the feelings of our constituents. The number of letters

I have received containing violent expressions of opinion cause me concern. We have been here too long and do not know what the atmosphere is in our constituencies. I should like to go home and walk the streets of Edmonton for a month or two, talking to the people. We should defer this issue for some time so that we can return to our homes, find out the views of the people, and return to the debate with a better perspective. That is the responsible manner of handling this national flag issue.

Mr. George Muir (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, in entering this debate for the first time I should like to pose a question to the Prime Minister. It is a question I have posed to me every time I return to my riding and I think it is one the Prime Minister should answer. The question is: Who asked him to bring in a new flag?

An hon. Member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): You will hear from me later, young man. We know there are certain elements in this country that are prepared to divide the nation just as they have been prepared to do so since confederation.

An hon. Member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): Mr. Speaker, you and I have been in politics long enough to have seen and heard a lot of things but this is the first time I have ever heard a bilingual jackass. As I say, ever since confederation there have been people who have tried to change our symbols. So I wonder who the Prime Minister is trying to appease by bringing this matter forward at this time, and what plausible reason is there for the introduction of this subject at this particular stage in our history when certain divisive elements are aggravating the nation to the point of exasperation. By his timing of the flag issue and the manner of its introduction the Prime Minister has, in the words of a recent *Globe and Mail* editorial, "set the nation on a collision course". I quote one paragraph from this editorial:

In his haste to give Canada a distinctive national flag Prime Minister Lester Pearson has set his government and the nation itself on a collision course. There is still time for him to alter it. But there is not very much time.

As a basis for this statement the paper goes on to list certain errors committed by the Prime Minister in his involvement with the flag issue. The first was when he told a group of foreign language newspaper editors in Winnipeg that within two years of assum-