

Canadian Flag

Mr. Pearson: The government will indeed take responsibility for the design which is submitted to the House of Commons.

That design later turned out to be the three leaf design. On May 19 we did not know what it was. But the Prime Minister said the government would accept responsibility for the design. The hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam then asked a question and the Prime Minister replied:

The members have had an election pointed at their heads like a gun in respect of every decision that has been made in this house on policy matters since we took over the government. I have pointed out, and I think I should make it quite clear, that when the government submits to parliament a matter of policy—and this is certainly a matter of policy—the government must stand or fall on the result of the decision of the house.

Then the right hon. gentleman went on to say he did not intend to hold it against any member of the Liberal party who voted against the design. But this was certainly a matter of government policy. Where is that three leaf flag today, Mr. Speaker?

Then we retreated again—I am sorry; we withdrew. We withdrew to a free vote on August 21.

An hon. Member: It was not a retreat?

Mr. Cowan: I said we withdrew, and the statement then made by the leader of the government was:

There has been criticism that the government was attempting to influence a decision in its favour by the threat of an election if it were defeated on the issue. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I stated at yesterday's meeting and I am glad to repeat it to the house today that in our view votes on the resolutions and on amendments to them will be entirely free. That is, an election will not be at stake on such votes.

That is a most interesting statement, because I have another statement here by the Secretary of State. Speaking in Toronto on June 13 the Secretary of State told a press conference that the flag was "nevertheless a government proposal and that a defeat on the question could cause an election". I ask you, Mr. Speaker, where is the three leaf flag of June 13? I have quoted the Secretary of State himself.

We were told that this question would never go to a committee, that it was a matter to be decided by the full parliament of Canada in all its majesty and with all its capabilities. Well, we improved our position by withdrawing to previously prepared positions and putting the question into the hands of a committee. This was as a result of the discussions we had on the flag during the summer months.

[Mr. Cowan.]

Out went the three leaf flag. We now have a one leaf flag. I maintain we should hold a plebiscite among the people of this country from Vancouver island to Newfoundland to find out what they want on a single transferable vote basis with a few suggestions put before them including the Canadian red ensign. I know what will command the majority vote in this country and that is why I say "Put the red ensign on the transferable ballot".

Speaking about our improvements and withdrawals, we were to have a new flag on July 1. It was going to look terrific. Well, the same flag is still flying that was flying when this country was built up, and it will continue to fly from that same flagstaff. Then we were to have a new flag so the Queen could come over here and lower the jack in the red ensign and run up the three dying leaves of the new flag in October. But October, too, has come and gone. Now we are told we will have a new flag by Christmas. Mr. Speaker, we are going to have a flag by Christmas; it will be the red ensign with the jack in the hoist.

Mr. Winkler: Where are all the hecklers now?

Mr. Cowan: I understand from a ruling made by the Chair last night while the hon. member for Moose-Jaw-Lake Centre was speaking that it is not in order to quote from a newspaper editorial written during a current debate. I cannot figure out in my mind whether an editorial which appeared in *Le Devoir* on August 22 was written during the current debate or not. At that time the debate was on the three leaf flag. We are now in the course of a debate on a plebiscite in connection with a one leaf flag, and if there is a ballot I should like to see the red ensign on the ballot. May I quote from an editorial written in August?

Mr. Speaker: With the greatest of interest and the greatest of sympathy for the hon. member, may I say that the question before the house is not a general discussion on the flag; it is whether or not we should have a plebiscite. The hon. gentleman, I know, was just warming up to deal with this question of the plebiscite. I do not know how long it takes. Perhaps he could confine the remainder of his speech to the question of a plebiscite. The subject of the flag and all the movement surrounding it is one which can be discussed on the main flag motion, but now