

Canadian Flag

what I thought was an impressive speech, although I did not agree with it, largely because the design for a Canadian flag embodied in these recommendations eradicated our past; that the maple leaf flag somehow eradicated our past, the maple leaf flag as the national flag of Canada, with which will be associated, though not as a national flag, an emblem which will recognize the association with the commonwealth of nations and our loyalty to the Queen.

This does not, Mr. Speaker, eradicate our past. This recommendation for a distinctive national flag, far from eradicating the past, salutes the Canadian future, the future of a great, united Canada, with many races, many peoples, two founding language groups, and many people who are proud to be Canadians. Yesterday, the right hon. gentleman said, and I think I am quoting him correctly, that to forget the past is to condemn the future. Who is doing that in this house, Mr. Speaker? Who is forgetting the past—

Mr. Churchill: The Liberal party.

Mr. Pearson:—and who is condemning the future?

Some hon. Members: You are.

Mr. Pearson: Is it condemnation of the future, the adoption of a Canadian national maple leaf flag?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: Those of us in the house who are of British descent do not forget our past, our traditions, our mother country and—

Mr. Korchinski: You sure act like it.

Mr. Pearson: Some hon. gentleman opposite says I act like it. I will let my own record speak for that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: Am I supposed to be forgetting my British past because I look forward to my Canadian future?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: I dislike speaking about myself, especially on an occasion like this, but I believe I have given evidence in my own life, in my own career, in my service in peace and war, of my devotion to the British past of this country, my devotion to the symbols of that past, my willingness to serve under those symbols when it was necessary to do so; and I do not apologize to any hon. gentleman in this house for my

devotion to that past and my dedication to a Canadian future.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: Yesterday the right hon. gentleman, in some moving words about the dedication of the French speaking element in this country to the British institutions and the British symbols of this country in the past, talked about the great heart of French Canada being, as he felt, with him in the stand he has been taking. To support that position he quoted from the words of a man from Quebec who has made his mark in Canadian history, Mr. Speaker Lemieux, who said many years ago—and perhaps the right hon. gentleman will forgive me if I quote this:

If you ask me why I am a British subject, and why I wish to remain one, I reply . . . that I prize most those institutions that secure me most strongly in our rights and liberties; and am proud to be a sharer in that great work of advancing peace and progress throughout the world, for which the British empire stands.

Those words, Mr. Speaker, are a moving illustration of much that is best in our history, but they are also an indication of how history changes and how important it is for us to change with it. The past can and must be honoured, but surely the past must not be permitted to prevent the changes that are necessary to adapt to the future; and if Mr. Speaker Lemieux were in the house today he would not be able to speak in exactly those terms. He would not be able to talk about the British empire in the way he talked about it in this quotation, because principles may not change but institutions do change. The British empire has changed. We do not talk about the British empire now in the sense that we talked about it 25 or 50 years ago, and quite rightly so.

There is no British empire in that sense. There is a commonwealth of nations of which an independent Canada is a part, an independent Canada which is proud of these traditions, proud of the principles on which our political life is based; but an independent Canada which now feels it should have the symbols of its independence, as we have been getting them over the years. Changes have taken place and we adapt, surely, to those changes. Someone has said that a country which ignores the lessons of history is condemned to repeat its tragedies. We do not ignore the lessons of history when we support Canadian symbols for Canadian nationality.