

*Canadian Flag*

they are—surely a plebiscite would solve the question for the government.

A large number of regional polls were conducted showing that the red ensign led the new flag by varying majorities. There was one held in Winnipeg and one in Newfoundland. The one in Winnipeg showed that 41 per cent liked the ensign as compared with 32 per cent for the three maple leaves. I could quote these articles at length. Norman Campbell in the *Ottawa Citizen* went to the trouble of dividing the letters received by the Prime Minister into five categories, one category calling for a referendum on the flag issue. The *Ottawa Journal* reported a 350 foot petition presented to the Prime Minister, advocating the ensign, sent from communities in Toronto and southern Ontario.

It is not just the Conservative party which is calling for a referendum. The *Toronto Telegram* of August 22 printed an editorial saying the voice of the people could be heard on this issue only through a national plebiscite. It said this was a matter which touched the hearts, emotions and loyalties of virtually all Canadians, and a parliamentary vote which would destroy the country's flag would foster strong feelings for years to come.

If that is not enough proof let us look back to 1961 when the Prime Minister was leader of the opposition. He was being interviewed on the radio, I believe. I am reading an excerpt from the *Amherst Daily News* of December 29, 1961. He was asked the question: "How would you poll the people on this?" The right hon. gentleman, who was then leader of the opposition, replied:

We would poll the people when they have a general election and if they don't like the idea of a distinctive Canadian flag which cannot be mistaken for that of any other country they will let us know in no uncertain terms.

What has happened to the opinion the right hon. gentleman held in 1961? I realize hon. members opposite are in a precarious situation. They cannot say anything because if they back the Prime Minister today he may change his mind tomorrow and perhaps they do not all want to be as inconsistent as he has been.

Then there was another question addressed to the Prime Minister. He was asked whether he thought the country needed this symbol to hold us together. And the right hon. gentleman—he was then the leader of the opposition—replied:

Yes, I think it would be a good idea to have a flag, a distinctive Canadian flag, in the interest of national unity.

[Mr. Slogan.]

He went on to say:

We should try to solve this problem in a manner which would create the minimum of division and the maximum of unity.

We agree with all those sentiments and ideas put forward by the right hon. gentleman at that time and I, for one, can say I had a much greater regard for the Prime Minister when he was leader of the opposition than I have had for him since I have seen the way he holds the reins of government today.

Indeed, one reason for the desirability of holding a plebiscite on this issue is the inconsistency shown by the Prime Minister. The hon. member for York-Humber (Mr. Cowan) indicated in the course of one of his speeches that the first flag chosen was the personal design of the Prime Minister and that it had not been placed before the caucus of Liberal members. The Prime Minister also indicated when this matter arose that parliament either had to choose this design or face a general election. I call that political blackmail. As a result of the views subsequently expressed on behalf of this party the Prime Minister backed away from that suggestion. There might have been other reasons. In support of this contention I will quote a headline from the *Toronto Globe and Mail* of June 18. It refers to the Prime Minister as regarding both flag votes as a confidence test. If we go on to July 20 we see that in the *Toronto Telegram* there is another headline: "Accept My Flag or Else, Warns a Defiant Pearson". The article says:

Mr. Pearson is laying down the law with fire and fury after a breakdown of all-party talks on a firm agenda for the next month.

Well, the fire and the fury have turned into smoke which has camouflaged the real intention of the Liberal government. A month later we read the following headline in the *Montreal Gazette*: "Free Flag Vote—Pearson Calls Off the Whips". What was the reason for this? Let us consider another headline which appeared in the *Chronicle-Telegraph* on August 12—"Election on Flag Could Kill Liberals". So perhaps there are various political reasons why the Prime Minister has been vacillating and changing his mind. But those reasons are not based on principles; they are not based on the interest of national unity. They are based directly on the political advantages the right hon. gentleman had hoped to gain by being the one who would bring in a distinctive national flag. He was leader of the opposition when the former prime minister, the hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) brought in the bill