

Canadian Flag

So spoke Mr. Hanson at that time. The member for Lake Centre, now the right hon. gentleman, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) speaking in the same debate on January 30, 1942, as reported at page 186 of *Hansard*, said this:

Allow the members of parliament to vote on this question. Do not submit the question to the people of Canada, for in my opinion, the taking of a plebiscite at this time may well destroy the unity of Canada.

Later, when the decision was made, he said this on February 25, 1942, as reported at pages 836 and 837 of *Hansard*:

A plebiscite is to be taken regardless of the fact that in the long history of Great Britain, with all the constitutional changes which have taken place, no government has ever submitted any matter to the people by way of plebiscite.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the time has now come for the government, in our tradition of responsible government, to take action by submitting this resolution to parliament for decision. Parliament will then take the responsibility and parliament will decide. If the government resolution is defeated, then on a matter of such major importance the government has obviously lost the confidence of parliament. If an amendment is submitted, as I presume there might be, substituting the red ensign for the maple leaf design, and if it were passed, then that flag, by action of the parliament of Canada, would become the flag of Canada.

Some hon. Members: It is.

Mr. Pearson: By order in council it is, until parliament makes a decision.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: But if parliament accepts the resolution as it is now, then the flag in the resolution, accepted by parliament, will be submitted to the Queen for a royal proclamation, as is the proper procedure, and it becomes Canada's flag by true parliamentary mandate. It will not be the flag of a person or a party; it will be the flag of the people of Canada by the decision of their representatives in parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Webb: A political flag.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is the right procedure. I believe that this is the right moment in our history to take this decision. May I quote the Right Hon. Vincent Massey, speaking in Charlottetown

on June 1 at the annual meeting of the Association of Canadian Clubs. He said then:

Historians, I am sure, will point to the early 1960's as a time of doubt about our future as a nation, when we were subject to dangerously heavy constitutional and emotional strains; when the very structure of our national life was questioned; when people were prepared to ask whether the Canadian experiment was worth while; when union with a more powerful neighbour was talked about with a freedom that would have been looked on as treason in former years; when the cynics and the fainthearted dared to belittle the deeds of their fathers and instil doubts in their sons.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that a national flag of the kind described in this resolution, that will be exclusively Canadian, will bring us closer together; give us a greater feeling of national identity and unity. Today especially, as Mr. Massey has reminded us, we need faith and confidence in ourselves as Canadians, with pride in Canada, devotion to our country. I believe that the adoption of this resolution will help to produce that result. If I did not deeply and sincerely so believe, I would not be introducing it into this House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, in taking this position, I know there are others—

An hon. Member: Joey.

Mr. Pearson:—who are as patriotic and as Canadian as I am or can ever hope to be, who disagree honestly and deeply. I respect that kind of honest disagreement. I know, also, that a flag issue is bound to raise strong and deep and genuine emotions. All national symbols have a deep meaning and create strong sentiments. That is why they are so important in national growth; in nourishing loyalty and patriotism among those who make up our nation. It is inevitable, therefore, that there will be strong emotional reactions when there is any suggestion that old symbols should be dropped, or adapted to new conditions and new needs.

Whatever our strength of feeling may be, however, on one side or the other I am sure we can discuss this matter in this house with respect for each other's views and in a way, as I said this afternoon, which will be worthy of the historic importance of this occasion. We have a responsibility to history in this debate and I am sure we all wish to be worthy of that responsibility, on whatever side of the house we sit. And when a decision is reached, whatever that decision may be, we will all, I know, abide by it and do what we can to secure its universal acceptance in this country.