

Canadian Flag

small group who are so anxious to get rid of the red ensign; who had a feeling that perhaps there would not be a majority in this house who would have a free vote to change our national flag. I suggest that to satisfy that element the Prime Minister changed his position. All I can say is that if the Prime Minister would look at his own words on the importance of a flag to the unity of this country he should also take a look at his own methods and at what he is doing to unity across the rest of the country.

I am sure that like myself all hon. members of this house have received numerous letters, but I have been very shocked by the tone of some of the letters which I have received from people in my constituency. I know I can truthfully say that a couple of years ago the question of the flag was one which aroused very little interest. You would hear the matter mentioned now and again. I thought people seemed generally to be in favour of the red ensign, but no one was excited about a flag. That situation now seems to have changed, and frankly the extent to which feelings now run makes it more and more necessary that we should pause at this stage.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, why the rush? Personally I think that if we had taken a month or two off or dropped this debate until all hon. members had had the chance to go home for a couple of months and talk to people in their constituencies, they would then have been able to come back here and report to the house just how the feeling in the country is running. I do not care whether this house can, by getting a majority of members to vote in favour, bring in a new flag design. I do not think any of us will feel very good if we bring in a new flag design and then find that the majority of the people across the country do not like it, are annoyed at the method by which it was achieved, that it was generally unacceptable to people, and that they would not fly it or respect it.

Just to give an example of the type of feelings which are aroused, Mr. Speaker, this is a quotation from a letter I received on May 21:

No wonder thousands of us are so mad, that if the rumours be true, that there is a movement for the separation of western Canada from the east, we will all be only too glad to join it.

This is part of a letter to the editor of the *Edmonton Journal*, headed "Let Quebec go":

The time has come for all of Canada to vote on whether Quebec should separate. I believe the rest of Canada is more in favour of Quebec's independence than Quebec itself.

I shudder when I get correspondence like this because I cannot remember any such feeling before in my lifetime as that now apparent in western Canada. And I have received a lot of that type of mail. There is only one explanation for it at the present time, and it is the flag.

I will admit that the method used by the present government in dealing with the provinces and with the agitation from the province of Quebec has caused considerable worry in the west. Many questions have been asked, but they were not angry questions. There was puzzlement. We in this house are aware that there was a stirring in Quebec, but there was puzzlement in the west. There has been no articulate voice from the province of Quebec to tell us exactly what they want. There is a feeling of restlessness, a new movement, and we can understand that. The only question western Canada is asking is: What do they want? Never was an answer given, so there was never any chance clearly to understand Quebec's problem or the solution which this government has attempted. When we see the flag issue being handled in this manner it brings to mind every unanswered question these people had about the problem, and every bit of frustration they felt at not being able to understand. What you do not understand you do not sympathize with; and when you hear it more and more but have no sympathy with it, you soon resent it. I would suggest that if this flag issue had not been brought forward and if it were not being handled—

Mr. Prud'homme: Would the hon. member permit a question? Would he tell me if he has ever tried as a member of this house to understand Quebec, and as a member of his province explain the point of view of the Quebecker, as I for instance try to understand his problems and explain them to the people in my province?

Mr. Nugent: Mr. Speaker, I will answer that in a second; I just want to finish making the point I was on. If the flag issue had not been raised and was not being handled in this present manner by the government, that feeling of puzzlement and bewilderment over Quebec would not have turned into the deep resentment shown in so many letters I am now receiving.

In answer to the hon. member's question, I have attempted many times to get from members in this house just what it is that Quebec wants. I have heard many hon. members from Quebec say that they themselves