

Canadian Flag

ernment in this matter to the House of Commons I would hope every member of the house would vote as his conscience dictates, and that there would be no question of confidence or non-confidence in a party sense.

Later the Prime Minister had second thoughts about this. Some of his image makers said: You cannot do this; it will result in another defeat; you must put on the whip; you must get out the lash; you must cram this down the throats of the Canadian people whether they like it or not; if you don't, you will be charged with another retreat. In any case, when the leader of the New Democratic party (Mr. Douglas) raised this question again on May 19, as recorded on page 337 of *Hansard*, he had changed his mind. This is how the exchange reads:

Mr. Douglas: I want to ask the Prime Minister whether he considers a free vote to be one in which the members have an election pointed at their heads like a gun.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Speaker, 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.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Crouse: You are happy about it, are you?

Then, to continue quoting the Prime Minister:

But we have gone out of our way, and I have gone out of my way personally, to let the members of this party know that in a question so personal, so close to their conscience, so deep in their emotions, as a flag, a member of the Liberal party, in voting against the decision submitted by the government, would not be read out of the party for so doing.

Well, hon. members opposite have at least that much to go on. They know that if they stand up and vote as their consciences dictate, at least they will not be voted out of their party. But let me return to what the right hon. gentleman said:

This is a matter of policy...the government must stand or fall on the result of the decision of the house.

The Prime Minister has presented his flag design and he has indicated that unless the resolution before us receives majority support he will consider the vote as being one of non-confidence in his government and plunge this country into another federal election. Only the Prime Minister has this power. He is the only one who can call an election at this time. If he were to do so it would, in

[Mr. Crouse.]

my opinion, be nothing short of an election of frustration. If he had a majority of members to back him up in the House of Commons, regardless of the size of the Conservative following it would be our responsibility to bring the request of the people of Canada before this house. It would be our responsibility and we would have to discharge it; there would be only one course open to the Prime Minister if he had a majority, and that would be either to implement closure or to close down the house and call another election. But in his present minority position any election he may call would be nothing short of an election of frustration.

This is the threat. This is the club held not only over the heads of government supporters but also over the head of each member who holds a seat in the House of Commons: Either vote for this resolution or there will be an election. In my opinion no vote on the proposed resolution regarding the flag can be called a free vote, nor will it give a clear indication of what any member is thinking, regardless of where he sits in the house, if he is threatened by the Prime Minister with another federal election should the motion fail to carry.

This is nothing short of political blackmail. Some Canadians are asking us as a responsible opposition to do everything in our power to prevent another election. At the same time they are asking us to do everything in our power to prevent the Pearson pennant from passing the house. I ask the Prime Minister: Is he not aware of the necessity to improve understanding among our different racial, religious and cultural groups as quickly as possible? Is he not aware of the serious cleavage in Canada today which threatens to pull up by the very roots the tree planted by the Fathers of Confederation almost 100 years ago? By introducing this flag resolution at this time the Prime Minister has stirred up racial differences between the two great founding races of the country which will set back the clock of national unity by at least 50 years. I ask the house, is this the price the Liberal party is prepared to pay for its flag? It is evident to me that the Liberal party has not realized that it cannot pull down the Canadian red ensign without men rising to its defence.

By order in council dated January 26, 1924 the red ensign was dedicated as the Canadian flag, the distinctive emblem of Canada. That was over 40 years ago and it served as a distinctive flag for our Canadian forces during