

Canadian Flag

before all the parties had hardened in their positions we could possibly—and just possibly—have come up with a compromise flag that would have satisfied all Canada. But there were other considerations in the committee. The committee studied over 2,000 new designs. They were given a deadline by the Prime Minister; they were pressed for time. Any hon. member who has sat on a committee faced with a great volume of work coming across the committee desks knows that you cannot do a proper job if you are pressed to get it done by a certain time. I think that had the committee, even this committee, had time to sit until, say, next spring they could even at this late date have brought in some kind of a flag that may have been acceptable.

This brings to mind the question, why this unseemly rush to foist a new flag on the nation? Why is it given the highest priority in government business at this particular time? This is something members of the official opposition just cannot understand, particularly when we should be concentrating on measures to assist our national well-being rather than debating issues that are going to divide our nation. If the Prime Minister had been well advised I think he would have followed the example of another illustrious Liberal prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King. Mr. King carefully avoided any attempt to foist a flag on a country that is initially divided not only racially but linguistically and culturally. Mr. King declined to have debate on this sort of issue because he knew how divisive it would be. He knew that bringing such a matter before parliament could only divide the nation. There was another Liberal prime minister who had sense enough not to bring a new flag design into the House of Commons, whether it was going to be decided by a plebiscite or not. He was smart enough to know that if he brought this divisive problem into the House of Commons it would do the nation no good. Unfortunately the present Prime Minister has ignored these gentlemen who so ably led his party for so many years. This is the tragedy of the present Prime Minister.

We hear from government members, particularly members of the cabinet, when they are touring the country that the official opposition are obstructing the work of parliament.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): I get some agreement from over there, Mr. Speaker, which indicates that they have all been deluded into [Mr. Muir (Lisgar).]

thinking that we are obstructing the country's business. But let me point out to hon. members something they should know already, namely that the government decides the priority of business for parliament.

Mr. Winkler: They are supposed to.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): They initiated this issue of the flag and introduced the debate at this time, in spite of the fact that they had no mandate to do so.

Mr. Winkler: At the expense of the poor eastern farmers, as well.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): They did it at the expense of getting something done for the poor eastern farmers; and that includes the constituency of the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Choquette) who represents, I understand, a number of those Quebec farmers who would like to have federal assistance.

Mr. Winkler: Where is the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Hays)?

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): In their stubborn insistence, government members want the flag resolution adopted even before they find out whether the majority of Canadians want a new flag. They want this flag for Christmas. I think it would help the country a great deal if somebody whipped up one of these new flags, hung it on the Christmas tree for the Prime Minister and let him have it for Christmas.

Mr. Winkler: Hang the whole government as well.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): But let us not have people running around this country telling other people that we are obstructing the work of parliament, when the man who can take off the flag priority and bring in legislation for the good of this country is the Prime Minister, who should be sitting over in his seat right now and is not there. I am referring to the leader of the Liberal party.

The government says the flag is more important than the labour code.

Mr. Winkler: No respect for Canada.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): That it is more important than the new pension scheme.

Mr. Winkler: No respect for the old people.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): That it is more important than legislation to help the farmers.

Mr. Winkler: No respect for the farmers; that is true.