

Canadian Flag

[Translation]

Mr. Boutin: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member allow me a question?

In his remarks, the hon. member maintained that the flag design should be submitted to the people in a referendum. If the flag proposed in that referendum were the union jack and if 95 per cent of the people of Quebec voted against it while 95 per cent of the people in the other provinces were for it, would the hon. member impose such a flag on Quebec even though it does not want it?

[Text]

Mr. Harkness: To begin with, Mr. Speaker, the union jack is not to be one of the alternatives proposed in the referendum as the Canadian flag. I think that is a sufficient answer.

Mr. Terry Nugent (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, I thought the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Harkness) did a very good job of illustrating the aspect of the flag question which the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) in his speech practically ignored. It is not just a question of whether we are now going to change our flag, and it is not just a question of whether a flag can unify this country: It is a question of how best a flag can unify the country, if you want to change it. I suggest that the method of change is going to attach itself to the flag; the feelings aroused at the time are going to attach themselves to the flag. I will read just a paragraph or so of the Prime Minister's speech on this subject, and I think these words are typical. He said:

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.

The Prime Minister went on and described at great length how important it was for a country to have a flag, how much a flag should stand for, what it would do for the country. But I suggest that an examination of his words does not reveal any special flag that is necessary to do this. All you have to do is have a national flag that is so accepted. I suggest he has completely ignored the

[Mr. Harkness.]

method of bringing it about. He has not given a single explanation to the house as to the rush, or why he is handling it in this way. He made a very long speech on this subject, and I cannot for the life of me understand how he could have ignored the question of the method of changing our flag.

I spoke once before in this house, two years ago, on a private member's resolution, and I am sure I was not the only one to whom this type of question had occurred. As reported at page 327 of *Hansard* for January 29, 1962, I said:

I feel that one purpose of a flag is to help achieve unity in this country. If there are going to be so many different views, and so many of them so strongly held, on what sort of a flag we should have, I suggest the process of choosing that flag could today cause more disunity than any other single action for years, with the possible exception of how the Liberals handled the conscription issue, or something like that.

Certainly I can understand the hon. member for Essex East wanting us to rush blindly into this. They have demonstrated, on more than one occasion, I will not say their anxiety but their carelessness about whether or not they disrupt the unity of this country.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the main theme which I wanted to make today, that there has been no explanation from the government, and that the method of choosing this flag is what is disrupting the country today. I think that even the most violent adherents to the red ensign, those who perhaps are not for the red ensign but are against the Pearson pennant, do not really care so much about the design of the flag as the method by which the government is attempting to introduce it. Certainly no explanation has been made in this house as to why the flag issue has to be settled this summer. No explanation has been made in this house as to why the flag debate should have priority over other important business.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the furthest thing from the Prime Minister's mind when this matter started was to make it a political issue. I suggest it has become a political issue and that the Prime Minister would really like now to withdraw from the position he has taken of staking the government's life on it. I am sure that no one in this country could more easily get away with changing his position than the Prime Minister. As the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Harkness) pointed out, it is apparent that at the start it was not going to be a political flag. I am not sure where the pressure came from to make the Prime Minister change his stand, but I have a feeling that it was from that