

*Canadian Flag*

The arguments have changed in connection with the holding of a plebiscite. Your Honour will recall that the Prime Minister, when speaking in June, said it would take time; that was an argument against it. He said, speaking of the plebiscite of 1942 on conscription, that it required many months from the introduction of legislation on February 13, 1942 to the announcement of the result on May 11, 1942. That was the excuse in June, that it would take time. I do not think anyone will say any more that this excuse is tenable. On more than one occasion we advanced this idea. Some will say this would create discord in the nation; that elections, as the Prime Minister said, are by constituencies and that the cleavages would be highlighted in a plebiscite in the same manner as in an election. Well, Mr. Speaker, if there is any danger of dividing the country, that could be met by the votes being counted not by provinces but by a central committee, so there would be no indication as to how any one province voted but they would vote one and all as Canadians.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Diefenbaker:** The next objection was that it would cost millions of dollars, \$10 million and more. Nothing of the kind, if held at the time of a general election; and with all the billions of dollars that are being spent, if it did cost \$10 million that would be a cheap expenditure to bring about within this nation a feeling of unity in this regard.

Would it be divisive? Is Ottawa divided as a result of the fluoridation and Sunday sport plebiscite of the other day? Every argument advanced is dissipated by the facts of life. We in this party trust the people. We want the people to have the right to speak. We want to know that whatever flag is chosen is the flag Canadians want, not one imposed by concealing from the Canadian people the true facts about the kind of distinctive flag they intended to advance. Now they are supported by their allies in this house.

That there is uncertainty about this is revealed by the fact that the government itself has changed its view. I do not want to recall in detail the change of viewpoint, but is it not a strange thing that a few months ago the government said "Three maple leaves or disunity in Canada"? Only Her Majesty's loyal opposition stood against that statement, and hon. gentlemen opposite called it obstruction. They said they had a design which would unite the Canadian people. Then when the committee met they swallowed their

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

views and went contrary to that which they said was the only design for Canada.

The Prime Minister said that a one maple leaf design was not acceptable, that it would not be suitable, and I will refer to that in a moment. What happened? Why the change? During the months of May, June, July and August these hon. members opposite, with their allies, were talking in favour of the three maple leaf flag, describing it as the only one. Then suddenly, overnight as it were, they changed their attitude. Were they right when they tried to push down the throats of Canadians the three maple leaf flag? Were they consistent when they abdicated from their previous position? I would be glad to hear the answers to those questions.

I said a moment ago that they educated the people into believing that the three maple leaf flag was the only flag. Let us just review events for a moment, because this shows that these hon. members opposite did not know themselves where they stood. They were united in support of something they jettisoned at the first opportunity. They tell me that a plebiscite is not necessary. If, Mr. Speaker, a plebiscite had been taken of the views of government members in May, June, July and August they would all have voted in favour of the three maple leaf flag. But what do they say of it now? They have changed their views, a not unusual course on the part of this government.

Hon. gentlemen opposite started out on this education process on April 17 when, as I said a moment ago, the stamps were issued by the department of the Postmaster General. On April 17, when the Prime Minister was asked in the House of Commons whether this was the chosen design, the design elect, he said it was pure speculation. Yet all across Canada, on that day and on following days, a picture of the three maple leaf flag was printed in the newspapers.

Then on May 14 the Prime Minister unveiled his flag to newsmen, tastefully draped on the mantelpiece at Sussex drive. On May 14, when asked in the House of Commons whether this was going to be Canada's flag, he said that no decision had been made. On May 16 the Postmaster General explained in an interview the symbolism of the three maple leaf design, stating that one leaf represented the English, one represented the French and the third represented those of other origins. That was the view of someone in his department and was not the fact. It had no basis in fact, for one has only to—