

CHRONICLE

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One nation, one flag

Where were you at noon on Feb. 15, 1967? I was on Parliament Hill in Ottawa along with thousands of other Canadians. We were there to witness the lowering of the Canadian Red Ensign and the raising of Canada's spanking new Maple Leaf flag. It was quite a moment.

Finally, after 97 years, we had our own flag. It was a beauty — a red maple leaf on white between red borders. The red was distinctive. The maple leaf stood out. What a flag! It took many long years and great debate to get this new flag. The search began in 1925. But it was the 1967 centennial celebration that spurred the selection.

Governor General Georges Vanier was present at the ceremony, as was Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. Both nodded in agreement when Maurice Bourget, Speaker of the Senate, said, "The flag is the symbol of the nation's unity, for it, beyond any doubt, represents all the citizens of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief or opinion." The crowd roared its approval.

Our flag has been everywhere. No matter where you go in the world today, it is instantly recognized. Canadians, even Quebec separatists, travel with a Canadian flag patch sewn on their clothing. It symbolizes that the wearer is a Canadian, a friend from a great country. And, that is how we are received.

Then why was a bastardized version of our great flag seen flying on Parliament Hill at Governor General Michaëlle Jean's swearing-in ceremony a few weeks ago? It was Canada's flag with two blue stripes inside the red borders. A fringe group that call themselves "The Renewed Canadian Flag for Canadian Unity and Linguistic Duality" was responsible. According to their Web site, the blue border represents the francophones in Canada. Their goal is that "this duality flag may one day become Canada's officially renewed Canadian flag symbolizing unity and harmony on our national emblem." What hogwash!

Canada is a free country. More than 100,000 Canadians died in two world wars so we can

have the rights and freedoms we share, including freedom of expression. That this group runs around in the St. Patrick's Day Parade and elsewhere hoisting their creation is fine. What bothers me is when they impose themselves uninvited on another's celebration.

Governor General Jean spoke of doing away with Canada's solitudes. Yet this marginal group, in direct contrast to what Ms. Jean was promoting, said its banner had a place because the new Governor General was French.

The group also hoisted its creation — with the number 9 clearly seen in

the red maple leaf — in front of the Notre Dame Basilica at the funeral of Maurice Richard. I knew and travelled with The Rocket for some 40 years. I never heard him once decry or speak of changing the Maple Leaf.

The group's Web site claims its "Canadian Duality Flag" has been flying at Our Lady of Fatima Church in Saint-Laurent since the death of Claude Ryan. I sat with him in the National Assembly and never heard him once talk about the need to change our great flag. By the way, a friend and I travelled to Our Lady of Fatima Church last week just to check. The bastardized flag is no longer there. The Renewed Canadian Flag for Canadian Unity and Linguistic Duality group writes that its banner is "a fitting tribute to honour the legacy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau." What an insult to an exceptional Canadian. I knew the former Prime Minister for some 40 years. He adored our flag as is. The group's tattered banner has flown for many years in the backyard of a Lachine household along Highway 20. It can fly there forever. But don't barge or crash into another's parade under the pretense that, because the honouree is French, Canada's official flag doesn't represent them.

As Senator Bourget said when Canada's official flag was raised for the first time, the red Maple Leaf is a symbol of Canadian unity and "represents all the citizens of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief or opinion." No truer words were ever spoken. One nation — one people — one flag.



GEORGE SPRINGATE

James Bond: a true h