

Canadian Flag

We must recognize that there is only a very small minority of the Canadian people in favour of the proposed flag. Under these circumstances, with a great majority of the people opposed to this particular design for one reason or another, surely the government is not going to hold on to an adamant position that the flag which it has produced must be accepted. Surely that is not democracy. Surely it is not reasonable. I would hope very much that the government will be prepared to modify the position it has taken so far.

One of the arguments made against doing anything other than what the government has proposed, is the time argument, that this whole thing has gone on long enough, in fact has gone on too long and that it is time now to make an end to it. I suggest that argument is neither compelling nor convincing. We have talked about a new flag ever since 1945, and probably before that. In view of that long intervening period, and in view of the fact that the Prime Minister has still a considerable length of time to implement his election promise I feel the time argument is not an important one. We still have plenty of time to get this whole matter settled in a reasonable way and in a way that the majority of the people of the country would approve of. In any event, Mr. Speaker, it is surely much better to take more time in order to reach a solution that is satisfactory than to push one through that is extremely unsatisfactory.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Harkness: I believe that the flag issue could be settled reasonably on somewhat the following lines. They have been indicated by other hon. members at various times and in various ways, but I would like to put them forward again. I think the first step should be to appoint a committee of the house or a joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons to recommend a design for the flag, or possibly two or three alternative designs. I am not going to put forward the arguments in connection with that; the hon. member for Waterloo indicated some of them a short time ago. I think this is the reasonable way to go about deciding on a design at the present time.

The second step should be to submit the design recommended, or it and one of the alternatives perhaps, together with the red ensign and the government's proposed flag to the people themselves in the form of a plebiscite or referendum. Surely this is a matter which affects every Canadian emo-

tionally to such an extent that he should have the right to express his own views in regard to it. I think only by that means will you ever really get a solution of this problem which the majority of people will accept.

The third step, of course, would be for the House of Commons to adopt by resolution the flag which had been selected as a result of the plebiscite or referendum. I do not think there is any doubt that the division of opinion is such—and these opinions are very strongly held—that there is no other way in which the majority of Canadians can be persuaded to accept a new flag, whatever flag may finally be arrived at. However, I believe that the democratic process is so firmly rooted in Canada and accepted to such an extent that once the people of the country as a whole have expressed their wish, their will, in connection with the flag, the remainder of the people, no matter how strongly they may personally have been opposed to the flag recommended, will accept it. Certainly this is the case as far as I am concerned. I am a strong believer in the red ensign, but if the majority of the people of this country expressed a preference for the design the government has proposed, or for any other design, I would be quite prepared to accept it. I cannot, however—and I think I represent most Canadians in this point of view—accept the design the government has proposed simply on a partisan vote in this house. Such a vote is essentially a vote of confidence in a minority government, rather than a vote on the basis of people's individual feelings on the flag issue itself. I think it is the worst possible way in which to attempt to settle this issue in a parliament of this kind, a parliament which was not given any mandate to produce a new flag. Certainly the Liberal party did not put this issue forward as one of their main election planks, and people did not vote for them on that basis. Even if that had been the case, they did not win anything like the majority of the votes of the country, and therefore they have not a mandate from the majority of the people of this country to introduce a new flag of this kind.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would appeal to the Prime Minister and the government to follow a compromise course along the line I have suggested, or along any other line which will produce a settlement of this question, which will heal the bitterness which has been evoked so far and which will produce a flag which the majority of Canadians will accept.