

Canadian Flag

There are those who say a flag must be completely distinctive and there are those, almost equally large in number, who claim that any national symbol must bear some evidence of our history and, if possible, our British connection. Having regard to the controversy that has raged, these two groups may at this time seem absolutely irreconcilable; but I am not so sure of that. However I am sure of one thing, and that is that to impose absolutely the wishes of one of these groups on the other is not an act of unity but an act of disunity.

Emotions cannot be controlled by legislative fiat. The losers in such a decision could be just as opposed and as bitter as ever to the adopted design, and Canadian unity, which after all is presumably the reason for our adopting a national symbol, would suffer a disservice. Discussions on the flag are not new. They have been going on for many years, but during those years conditions in Canada have changed, and changed greatly.

No longer does the cry that was sometimes heard, that an Anglo-Saxon majority was imposing its will on a French Canadian minority, have much validity because Canada, much like this House of Commons, is now a country of minorities; and this will be, whether we like it or not, a continuing fact of Canadian life. Other conditions are changing too—

Mr. Caouette: That is not right.

Mr. Smith: It is right. Canadian developments in these days of rapid communication, no matter how much some of my friends might not like to know it, have been and are being greatly influenced by our giant neighbour to the south. Economic patterns are changing and changing rapidly, and this is affecting our cultural lives. It is no longer just a struggle to protect French Canadian culture or English Canadian culture, but it is going to be a struggle to maintain a Canadian culture and identity; and in this struggle, whatever our racial origin, we must try to be together and work together. We must not further divide ourselves unnecessarily over a question such as is involved in the selection of a flag or an emblem; and all Canadians, in parliament and outside it, have a share in the responsibility for not facing these problems earlier.

If the matter brought forward by the Prime Minister had been introduced in a less partisan political way I think most of the bitterness that has now arisen could have been avoided. Perhaps it is still not too late to

[Mr. Smith.]

repair some of the damage done to Canadian unity, but I know it is possibly too late for an ideal solution. It is possibly too late for a long drawn out solution, or for a conference of the type that would be long drawn out, but surely it is not too late for a compromise that will leave feelings less embittered than they are now.

I am sure that if a small committee of the house were appointed it could quickly produce some formula for national symbols that would bring together, rather than divide further, the Canadian people because, make no mistake and have no illusions, we are being divided over this issue. However I am sure something can be done that will repair some of the damage and avoid further damage.

In closing I would like to commend my proposal to the Prime Minister and to the leaders of the parties that they try earnestly to consider some conference method, some quick conference method, or some alternative similar to a conference, that will solve the problem and get Canada off the collision course on which it now seems to be.

Mr. Lloyd R. Crouse (Queens-Lunenburg): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise to participate in this debate on the invitation of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson), and I welcome the opportunity to place on the record my views, and the views and opinions expressed to me in recent months by my constituents, relative to the flag proposed by the Liberal party as a national flag of Canada. I also wish to present my views on the proposal made by my leader that a plebiscite be held to determine this issue. In my opinion this is the only method that will guarantee that Canadians have a voice in settling this problem.

This afternoon I thoroughly enjoyed the remarks of the hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. MacRae), a holder of the Military Cross for outstanding bravery beyond the call of duty in world war II. He speaks with the courage of conviction earned on the battlefield, and in my opinion he made an outstanding contribution to the debate.

I have received numerous letters and petitions on this controversial subject, and without exception all these letters have requested me to endorse the retention of our present flag, the Canadian red ensign, or a modification of the ensign containing the union jack in the corner. I have not received one letter from my entire constituency, which totals some 50,000 people, requesting my sup-