

Flags of Canada

I remain convinced that the hon. member for St. Boniface, as a Canadian is a great patriot who proclaimed himself in favour of a distinctive national flag.

I feel, however, that a referendum is not necessary, but that it is the responsibility of the government to give the Canadian people the distinctive national flag they want so much.

I have confidence in this government, and I am convinced that if it does not manage to provide Canada with such a flag many other governments will come and go before we can have a national flag of our own.

Mr. Alfred Belzile (Matapedia-Matane): It is with great pleasure that I rise, Mr. Speaker, to make a small contribution to the debate on the resolution now before the house and which was put on the order paper by the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Regnier).

This resolution does in no way call for the opinion of experts, but rather for the opinion of true Canadians. It is therefore my duty to make known my personal views on this always timely subject, and I may say that these views undoubtedly reflect the ones held by almost all those I have the privilege of representing here.

May I say, Mr. Speaker, that I am in complete agreement with this resolution, for a number of reasons I shall now make known.

This matter of a flag has been repeatedly dealt with in this house. Different views on the subject have been expressed in all parts of the country by many representatives from various political parties. But it is encouraging to note a growing tendency to favour a distinctive national flag displaying no emblem recalling any country other than our own. This is a development which is welcomed by all Canadians who have patriotism and national pride, for it fosters the best of unity.

While retaining great respect and great admiration for our forefathers, for the traditions they have left us and also for the culture, the faith and the language that have come to us through generations, we should not forget that we are first and above all Canadians.

We all recognize Canada as our country. We love and revere Canada. Thanks to the efforts of the preceding generations, and to the constant work of the present generation, Canada has shown a remarkable economic and cultural development in a relatively short period of time. A former colony, we have rapidly

[Mr. Dubois.]

developed into a country whose importance is recognized the world over, a country which is proud of the independence it has conquered within the framework of the commonwealth. Our contribution to the fight for peace and freedom in two great world wars has won the admiration of all free nations. We are universally recognized as a mature and proud nation where two great cultures exist in complete harmony and which have both contributed to the greatness and development of Canada.

Being a mature and independent nation, we must act accordingly. Any nation that can play the part which has been ours for more than a quarter of a century among the free nations of this world must, if it really possesses the proud feelings so generally acknowledged, behave and act as a proud and free nation.

Can we really be the people we pretend to be when, unlike other nations of equal importance and even unlike nations that have not yet reached the degree of maturity of our country, we are still without a national flag, an emblem of our own, a symbol of our pride and independence?

Why this anomaly? Why are we so short on Canadianism? The answer is obvious. If every one of us had refrained over the years from making this matter of a flag a political football, and if we had made an effort, harmoniously and dispassionately, to find an answer to this important problem, there is no doubt that by now Canada would have a national and distinctive emblem. Sad to say, however, our political feelings have been stronger than our patriotic feelings. This is a cruel truth, I agree, but I for one will have the honesty to confess it publicly.

On this question which has seemed to us to be one of the thorniest, we must admit, to our shame, that we have too long questioned the patriotism and the intelligence of all our fellow citizens, of whatever origin.

Sometimes, we were afraid to hurt the feelings of a certain section, at other times we had to cater to the extreme nationalism of another section of our population. However, whatever the reasons which dictated our attitude, the main one at all times was the thought of possible effects on the outcome of the elections. In all cases, unfortunately, we seemed to have forgotten that, before the thought of garnering votes, and because we were either of French or of English origin,