

*Canadian Flag*

asks us to accept a certain design. I do not accept it. I hope the majority of the house do not. It stands for nothing by way of history and tradition. It discards the past and I submit has no appeal for the future.

I leave this point of the design for the moment and refer again to the plebiscite. I say, Mr. Speaker, that this parliament has no mandate to scrap the red ensign and choose a new national flag, the design of which is generally conceded to have been chosen by one man. Here we are, 265 representatives in this chamber, being pressured by the government to discard the flag which we have been using for many years and to vote, yes or no, on the alternative design which the Prime Minister selects. Then the Prime Minister and the government inject the question of the choice of a national flag right into the realm of partisan politics when the Prime Minister states that the government is prepared to stand or fall on the acceptance of this resolution. It must be accepted or the house is dissolved and a new parliament is elected.

This simply means that every supporter of the government will vote for it as a matter of party loyalty, unless he or she has the necessary intestinal fortitude to stand for principle rather than party and refuse to be a slave to party discipline on a matter so vital to Canada and to his conscience. There will be very few government supporters who will meet this test. There is no need for this test to be imposed. There is no need for anyone to have to make such a decision, as I will explain later.

In the meantime I continue my argument that this parliament has no mandate to choose a national flag. I base this assertion on the fact that a majority of 265 members is 133 members, and these members are asked by the government to take the responsibility for selecting a flag which will be a symbol recognized and revered, I hope, by 19 million people. This works out exactly, Mr. Speaker, to seven people per million, because seven times nineteen makes 133. Let us think this over. Should we let seven persons per million of population choose the flag for any country? This is the question I want answered here. This is the ridiculous situation with which we are confronted today, and we never should have been asked to face it.

Who is to blame? Well, the Prime Minister is, because the resolution is in his name. Generally speaking the Liberal party is to blame as well, since there will be only a few people who will put principle ahead of party. I realize the government may argue that

[Mr. Flemming (Victoria-Carleton).]

this was an issue in the last election. I submit it was not; not in any general way, in any event. The Prime Minister says it was promised, and perhaps that is so. Where was it promised? I say it was not emphasized, it was not even a major plank in the Liberal platform. In my constituency of Victoria-Carleton I do not recall having heard a word about it, and my opponent never mentioned it once. I have no doubt many members can make similar statements. I repeat that we have no right to arbitrarily decide upon a new national flag and discard or destroy the Canadian red ensign in the process.

Even allowing, Mr. Speaker, that there may have been a minor mention of it made in the election, the important factor is the Prime Minister did not secure a majority of the votes cast or a majority of the seats in this country. This is a minority government, and it has no mandate to proceed with such a tremendous change simply on the basis of a majority vote in parliament. The Prime Minister must know and the government must know that this change, the design, is not acceptable to a large percentage of the people of Canada. In my opinion it is not acceptable to the majority of the people of Canada. However, the government proposes to have us swallow this design. Then, they say, if you do swallow it and comply with our wishes we will let you have a few days off to spend with your wives and families in your constituencies. I cannot and I will not accept this proposition.

The Prime Minister says he is committed. I do not agree that he is, in the light of the arguments previously advanced. I say to him even if he were committed he should put Canada before commitments unwisely made in the heat of an election campaign. He should explain, and he should refrain. To carry out unwise commitments is the negation of duty. He should not force a design upon the people of Canada in view of the large number of people, I believe a majority, who do not favour its acceptance.

I have another argument to present. A change such as is contemplated by this resolution is not, generally speaking, made by the majority in any assembly. If we examine the situation in the United States in connection with amendments to the constitution, or more recently the motion stopping debate on civil rights legislation, I submit we will find that questions of that nature, which are in the same general category as the flag issue in Canada, are decided only by a two thirds majority. Surely we will acknowledge that