

*Canadian Flag*

not entirely, it will be on a partisan basis. Such a vote destroys the very essence of anything approaching a free vote, particularly when the fate of the government depends on its outcome.

To get the question of the flag back on a reasonable basis I suggest the government should first revert to the Prime Minister's original position. This would put each member in the position of being free to vote on the amendment before us, and on others which I understand will be introduced, according to his own conscience, free from the threat of precipitating an election on the issue, an election nobody wants on such an issue. I believe there is unanimous agreement that holding an election on this issue would be bad for the country, would be divisive, and would destroy rather than help national unity.

When introducing this resolution the Prime Minister said the intention was to promote unity in the country. I think he and all other members must recognize that instead of promoting unity it has done the exact reverse. This flag issue has exacerbated French-English feelings and stirred up resentments where none existed previously.

Throughout my life in western Canada, and I think my experience has been pretty representative, I have never found any expression of anti-French feeling or anti-French sentiment, except perhaps for some rumblings during the conscription crisis in the first world war. I found none of these until one or two years ago. Then some of the separatist statements from Quebec naturally led to counter statements concerning the feelings of English people in western Canada. This was greatly added to by the sittings of the bilingual and bicultural commission out there, but what brought the matter into sharp focus was the flag issue.

Any attempt to settle the flag question on the basis of the present resolution is going to leave lasting wounds which it will take a very long time to heal. I know all members of the house regret that fact as much as I do, but I would appeal to those supporting the resolution to look at the situation as it actually exists. There is no use in the world shutting our eyes to the real situation. We must recognize it and we must try to find an acceptable solution for it. The situation is one of a great deal of confusion, a great deal of disunity and a very much poorer general feeling of nationhood than existed before the flag issue was introduced.

[Mr. Harkness.]

I appeal to the government to take a reasonable position in regard to this whole matter. This is something in which compromise is a necessity in the interests of the country, not a so-called compromise on the time to be taken for debate, but a real compromise, which holds the hope of arriving at a flag which the great majority of Canadians will accept. Anyone who looks at the matter in a fair way knows that the design submitted by the Prime Minister is not one which the majority of the people of Canada will willingly accept, one for which they will hold the proper feelings of respect and loyalty.

In that respect the majority of the public opinions polls which have been held on this question show a great similarity in their results, and I believe they have given a fairly accurate picture of public opinion on the flag. I do not propose to go into any of the individual polls and give the figures they announced, there were three or four held in my own city of Calgary and they were decisive, but the great majority of the polls held across the country can be summed up in this way.

First, an overwhelming majority of the people in Quebec who answered the pollsters' questions are in favour of a new flag. There is no question about that whatsoever. Second, in each of the other provinces there is a majority in favour of the Canadian ensign, or some modification of it. That majority in some provinces is quite small, but nevertheless a majority of the people answering the questions in each of the other provinces expressed themselves in favour of the red ensign.

The third result shows that of those people who favour a new flag a very large proportion want a design different from the three maple leaves which is proposed. The net result shows that feeling is fairly evenly split between those who would favour retention of the red ensign and those who would like to have a new flag, but of those who would like to have a new flag a very large proportion do not want the flag which has been proposed, but some other type of design.

There are various organizations in Quebec interested in this matter, such as the Ligue Pour Le Drapeau Canadien, which has worked on this matter for years, and has a design it is still anxious to have adopted. Various other organizations in that and other provinces also have designs which they would much prefer to the one which has been presented to us.