

Canadian Flag

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Mr. Choquette: This is 1964.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): I know this is 1964.

Mr. Choquette: Come back to the present.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): Whatever we allow to happen now on this issue will be permanent. We have an obligation to do a good job, and to do something that will be constructive and bring Canadians together. Therefore I feel that a plebiscite is one of the ways by which this can be done. If we find out what the Canadian people want in the way of symbolisms on their national flag we could then perhaps adopt a flag which would be acceptable. Perhaps the best way of doing this would not be by allowing them to make a choice from a number of completed flag designs, but by giving them a choice of symbols they would like included on the flag. I am sure that if that choice were given to the people the maple leaf would be one of the symbols chosen. I am also sure that the union jack would be one of the symbols chosen. I am not sure that the Canadian coat of arms, the fleur-de-lis or some other things, would be among the choices.

If the Canadian people were asked to choose three or four symbols from among a number, parliament would then know their feelings and a panel of experts could then design a flag incorporating the chosen symbols, and parliament could then adopt it.

Mr. Speaker, as one hon. member has already said, this is not something in respect of which there should be winners or losers, regardless of who they may be. This is a circumstance in which all Canadians should act in unity in order to have something of which each and every one can be justly proud, perhaps not for the same reason, but something that means something to each one.

I think it is divisive to try to insist that certain symbols, which millions of Canadians hold dear and cherish, should be eliminated from their flag. You cannot achieve unity by any one group pretending that if they do not recognize the other group it will disappear and go away, as it were. It is a fact that we are made up of two founding races and an intermixture of many other races. This is a fact. It would be folly for me as a Canadian of Scottish extraction over several generations to make myself believe or to do anything that would lead me to believe that all Canadians were of the same background

as I am. Therefore I am willing to allow Canadians of every origin to be represented in the flag; but I want the same privilege for myself.

This is a time for the government to reassess the situation. I would implore them to consider supporting the amendment.

An hon. Member: Let us vote and you will see.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): I would suggest there are other ways in which this very contentious matter could be removed from parliament. I started to say a while ago that I wanted to illustrate the situation by a very homely analogy. When I was a teen-ager and a young man back on the farm, we always threshed in the fall of the year in a fairly wet climate and when some member of the threshing crew wanted to have a rest and did not want to carry on with productive activity he just made sure that a couple of really soggy sheaves went into the machine, whereupon the machine was fouled up and had to be shut off to be cleaned out. This is what the government is doing and has been doing all summer. Every day, day after day, it throws into the mill of parliament this very contentious question of the flag and how it should be designed. The result is that it will not go through the mill itself and it prevents other important business from being done.

I think my time has just about expired, Mr. Speaker, but there is a crucial point I want to reiterate. A government, especially a minority government, has no right to impose legislation which, in a practical sense in any case, cannot be repealed by a future parliament. Therefore unless this action can be taken with the unanimous consent of every party and every faction in the house, and unless it has almost 100 per cent support from all language groups and all racial backgrounds from every part of Canada, it should not be in a partisan manner in this way. It should not be done because the implication is that when the government goes out of office, as it will, the succeeding government would normally be bound to change the flag, and this no Canadian would want. The flag should be at least as permanent as the constitution, and at least as difficult to amend as the constitution, and in most countries amendments of the constitution requires a two thirds majority vote, or something of that sort, over and above the normal requirement for legislation.