

Canadian Flag

The smouldering embers, created from other dissatisfactions, have now been fanned into a strong flame by the flag issue. The Prime Minister has chosen to plunge the nation into an emotional crisis that will be disastrous to our unity. He is ignoring our history and dealing a death blow to the future we had hoped for.

A prime minister who had the best interests of his country at heart would not try to build from the top but would begin by constructing a firm foundation. In my opinion the Prime Minister could have shown real leadership and statesmanship if he had gotten to the bottom of this country's problems, sorted out those that were vital to bringing about unity and harmony and then concentrated on these until all provinces had one and the same objective, the building of a great, free nation, in other words, a "one Canada". Follow then with a flag selected by all the people of this nation as a crowning achievement.

Hon. D. S. Harkness (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, the flag issue now before us is from the very nature of things an emotional issue. Unless a country's flag does provoke emotions of loyalty, affection and respect, it fails as a symbol of the nation. I submit that the Canadian red ensign has not failed in this regard so far as the majority of the people of Canada are concerned and that its retention, possibly with some modifications, will provide Canada with a more satisfactory symbol of our nation than anything artificially produced to take its place.

Long before this debate started, Mr. Speaker, and throughout the few days it has proceeded so far, statements have been made that Canada has no flag of its own and that it is time Canada had a flag of its own, as well as other similar statements. I think all such statements are demonstrably untrue. From my own point of view, certainly ever since I can remember, and that goes back to before 1910, the red ensign has been the Canadian flag as far as I was concerned and as far as all the people with whom I was associated were concerned. As far as I am aware, over the years there was no question that it was not the Canadian flag until the matter was brought up in parliament in 1945, subsequently in the debate with regard to the setting up of a flag committee and in the proceedings of that committee in 1946. As I say, as far as most Canadians were concerned it was accepted up to that time that the

[Mr. Noble.]

red ensign was the Canadian flag and there was no question in their minds on this point.

I think this was due to the fact that the ensign had been used and accepted as our flag at least since the time of confederation, and I believe before confederation. It flew from the tower of this very building in which we are conducting this debate from the time of confederation up until 1904.

There is a very interesting reference to the red ensign flying from the tower of this building in *Hansard* for March 17, 1904, page 219. I quote:

Mr. Henri Bourassa (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, before the orders of the day are called I would like to have an explanation from the government in regard to a small incident to which some newspapers and people have attached some importance. I noticed on the day of the opening of parliament as well as today, which is St. Patrick's day, that the Canadian flag which used to be put upon the tower of the parliament building has been replaced by a union jack. I would like to know why the old flag that has been used in Canada ever since confederation should be laid aside.

Now, this was the situation. The red ensign had been accepted as the Canadian flag and had been flown from this building from the time of confederation to the opening of parliament in 1904 when it was replaced by the union jack. It is interesting to note that Sir Wilfrid Laurier replied as follows:

I am sorry to say that I cannot satisfy to-day the rather fastidious curiosity of my hon. friend, but I will make inquiry and try to give him an explanation upon another day.

Mr. Bourassa goes on to complain that the flag had always been used on this building. Hon. James Sutherland, minister of public works, gave him an explanation to the effect that there had never been any official authorization for its use and that the official flag should be the union jack. I believe this incident, in itself, indicates the fact that the Canadian red ensign was Canada's flag. It had been used for a long period of time and had flown from this building as the symbol of Canada. The fact that it was replaced in 1904 by a Liberal government under Sir Wilfrid Laurier, I feel, was a great pity. If that action had not been taken in 1904, I doubt very much if we would be having this flag debate at the moment. It is an interesting speculation. If this action had not been taken in replacing the red ensign with the union jack in 1904, the flag issue would never have arisen. Nobody would have brought the matter up or questioned the use of this flag.

It is rather interesting to note that an almost similar type of complaint as that made