

Canadian Commonwealth Flag

[Text]

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to speak for very long during this debate, but I do wish to ask for some consideration about something in which I think that hon. members of this house should exercise justice.

In the next few minutes we are going to be asked to vote for the establishment of a second flag for Canada. I am much like many of those French Canadian members who are so very proud of their heritage and because they have been here for such a long time. I think I have been generous in allowing them to express their opinions. I have been very interested in listening to their opinions and their statements regarding their positions about the establishment of a new flag for Canada. This flag will give them the right to be proud of the development of Canada. It is a flag which they feel has no ties with any other country or with the past.

It is true that they look at our past in a little different way than I do, but it is safe for me to say that I too as an English speaking Canadian am interested in the establishment of only one flag for Canada. I honestly believe that that is the feeling of every member of this house.

The plea made by the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) in this house not long ago was made with some passion. I cannot agree with the position taken by the Prime Minister in introducing his plea, but I think he was sincere in that regard and I have no reason to doubt that sincerity.

Perhaps the French speaking members of this house will be fair with me as an English speaking Canadian. I have had difficulties in my riding over this flag issue as a result of the fact that a number of people who have come from the British Isles live in that riding. I am sure those difficulties have been experienced by other members who represent predominantly English speaking provinces or ridings. If we are to have two flags, one with some heritage attached to it and a new one without any historical significance, there will continue to be a conflict in many areas, particularly having adopted the red ensign a number of years ago. I think we should make sure that all Canadians have a flag that can be considered by everyone as the flag of Canada.

Surely there is no one French Canadian member in this house who would voluntarily fly the union jack, and if I am wrong in that feeling those members should have stood in

[Mr. Caouette.]

their places and given some indication of that feeling. At least 25 or 30 per cent of the people living in my riding are French speaking and I have not yet heard any of them express a desire to fly the union jack. I plead with the French Canadian members of this house at this time to refrain from confusing me as an English speaking Canadian about this problem which I have faced for many years. If we adopt a second flag for Canada the English speaking Canadians will in effect have two flags, while the French speaking Canadians will only have one, and we will not have solved the problem which I hope will be solved by the adoption of the one flag which I believe will provide all Canadians with a flag of which they can be proud.

I know there is a hardship in this regard as far as some members are concerned who have made commitments to their political parties, and who are being forced to vote against the wishes of their own constituents. It is important to me as an English speaking Canadian to have one flag which will symbolize our unity. I believe that French Canadians have now been given a flag which they can support, and I hope they will give that same right of support to English speaking Canadians by refraining from adopting a second flag which can only create conflict.

My plea is made with as much sincerity as the Prime Minister's plea of several days ago. Surely we are all in support of the position taken by the Prime Minister when he made a plea in this house that we all support one flag, and that we all get behind it with as much loyalty as possible. I make a similar plea to the members of this house, particularly the French speaking members, to give me as an English speaking Canadian an opportunity to believe in the unity of Canada under one flag, so that we all, English and French speaking can say: This is my flag because I am a Canadian.

Mr. McIlraith: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether it would be agreeable to not see the clock for a short period of time so that we can have the vote tonight?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Howard: Mr. Speaker, before we agree, perhaps the house leader might set a time limit on this in order that we will not be here until four o'clock in the morning. These open-ended agreements invariably run into difficulty. No one is able to predict the extent of the participation by hon. members of the house in a debate.