

Canadian Flag

Mr. Barnett: Would the hon. member permit a question. Would he be prepared to give his assurance to the house that if the Prime Minister does come in and make a speech on the flag we can then proceed to have a vote on the flag committee's report?

Mr. Coates: I thank the hon. member for giving me this degree of control over the Progressive Conservative party, which allows me to make decisions for every member therein. Unfortunately I am not in a position to have that type of control; nor do I want it. As a matter of fact, I believe that the action of the members of this party, following a definitive explanation by the government as to what it will do about the new flag once a vote has taken place on this motion, will indicate the position taken by this party in respect of the expected order in council. A vote having taken place in respect of the motion now before us will lead to some recommendation being made to the other place. One must hope that the honourable gentlemen of that place will have some consideration for the feelings, as they have been expressed, of the people of this country. Surely no responsible government would wish to shirk its responsibility in this regard.

Is it too much to ask the Prime Minister to indicate to this nation why he feels there should be a new and distinctive Canadian flag? After all, he is the man who has placed this House of Commons in the position where it has been for months, considering this question. Surely we can expect that the Prime Minister will stand and abide by a vote on the recommendation of the special committee on a Canadian flag, yet we have heard little or nothing from his supporters about that recommendation. Surely it is time that we should hear from the treasury benches as to how they feel about a distinctive and different Canadian flag. Surely we should hear from those individuals who voted for this proposed design in the committee and proposed the committee report now before us. Surely this is the time when we should hear from the ministers of the crown, who are responsible for the direction of this country. What can we expect from this government in the way of direction? Surely they consider themselves responsible to the people of Canada.

The government which now proposes that we adopt this flag is the same government which proposed last June that we adopt the flag with the three maple leaf design. At that time the suggestion was made that that

design was the one most acceptable to Canadian people. That was the government's statement. They have now changed their minds. If they find they must change their minds, and they are not sure, as is obvious, which flag is the flag to be adopted by this nation, surely they must realize that the people of this country should be given a choice.

The government now urging the adoption of the flag, as set out in the motion we are now discussing, is the same government which has changed its mind about the flag and about the time the flag must be adopted. Their argument seems to be that we should adopt the flag advocated by the majority of their members.

As a result of this attitude we have been subjected to a tortuous debate. We have been held responsible for this debate because we will not agree that the presently proposed design, recommended by the committee, is the most acceptable to the people of Canada. We do not intend to allow the House of Commons to be placed in a position of voting for or against something which is favoured only by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and others who occupy government benches. Those gentlemen feel that the proposed design is the one acceptable in this country. Those are the same ministers who favoured and supported the three red maple leaves design as presented by the Prime Minister. Perhaps they were impressed with that design because it was proffered by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, we are anxious to hear from the Prime Minister and his supporters as to their feelings in support of the flag proposed by the committee report now before us for concurrence. I am sure they could satisfy their desires at an earlier date if they produce answers to the many questions which have been asked. Surely they cannot expect overwhelming support for their proposal, or any support at all, when they, at the same time, continue their attitude of complete silence, which has been apparent since the committee's recommendation was presented to this house.

Mr. E. Nasserden (Rosthern): Mr. Speaker, my first words must be in reference to the fact that we have not heard from the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) about this report from the flag committee, which was set up by this House of Commons. This is not a majority report, in view of the fact that almost one third of the members voted against it. It is very strange, indeed, that the Prime Minister