

*Canadian Flag*

and we should not hesitate to take all the time necessary to do it right.

Many people have spoken of symbols and what the symbols on the flag are supposed to represent. It is the emotions and memories the flag evokes which make this such a serious matter to so many people. There is no doubt that many people in this country believe that a flag symbolizes not only the greatness of this nation, but certain facts about Canada and its history that we are proud of and that we hope will remain a permanent part of our future. To these people the removal of known symbols from our flag is a declaration of intention to destroy that part of our Canadian way of life.

Mr. Speaker, the controversy over the flag really boils down to one simple question: Do we have on our national flag any symbols of our history and traditions, or do we not? This is the one question on which we think there should be a national referendum. Some people may be opposed to a referendum or plebiscite because they feel there are too many practical difficulties in the way of permitting a decisive expression of opinion on the flag design. To my mind this is not necessary at all. The question need simply be asked: Should our flag have symbols and traditions? A simple "yes" or "no" is all that would be required, and I suggest that the work of the flag committee would then become relatively simple. I believe that an overwhelming majority of Canadians are in favour of retaining some symbols on our flag and I also believe they have a right to stand up and be counted on this important question.

I believe there is a great deal of misunderstanding in this country about the meaning of symbols. I am aware that many people believe that the presence of the union jack on our flag symbolizes some sort of subservience to Great Britain. I am aware that this feeling is strongly held in the province of Quebec and even to some extent in other parts of the country. We in this house know there is no question of subservience, and therefore that feeling is just plain nonsense. I am surprised that some members of this house continue to foster such notions and use such arguments. To me this is like the argument that there should be no statues in churches because some people say this suggests idolatry. Just because some people use this silly argument it has never stopped churches from having statues, because they know very well they are not their idols.

In exactly the same way I want to see the union jack kept on our flag as a proud declara-

[Mr. Forbes.]

tion and reminder of our democracy, passing on the British heritage of the parliamentary system and type of justice. This symbol is very precious and meaningful to most Canadians. No one can say that it mars the beauty of the flag design and the only argument for its removal is the silly one that some people foster a false interpretation of what it stands for.

The argument I might make to my French Canadian colleagues to enlist their support for this symbol is to remind them that it is not just the people of Quebec who are anxious that their right to their religion and language should be maintained. Western Canadians are every bit as devoted to the preservation of French Canadian rights as they are to their own. When there is misunderstanding of the French devotion to their language, responsible people in western Canada do not add strength to superstitions or ill-informed and harmful remarks. The one thing that is uppermost in the minds of responsible Canadians is that the right of individuals must be protected. In our democracy we take pride in the fact that Canadians have a right to be different. We conform to the rule of law but we do not ask the conformity of our neighbour to our particular brand of behaviour. The French Canadian's right to speak his language and retain his customs is cherished by the western Canadian and understood by him, just as he cherishes his own right to have his own language and customs. Once one right is taken away, all rights might soon slip away.

Western Canadians wish to have a fleur-de-lis on the national flag. It is a symbol and a reminder that Canada does have a history that we are proud of and that both races have made great history in building up this great Canada of ours. To me the decision of the flag committee would be acceptable if they had taken a flag with these two symbols on it. The symbols are small while the maple leaf is large, appropriate I would say to the philosophy that while we are proud of our history and traditions and intend to build on them, Canada's greatness lies ahead of us and the large maple leaf symbolizes the forward look of optimism of all our people. The two symbols are not just a reminder of our past; their position on the flag is also an indication of the future. They are placed wide apart, a symbol of their determination that both languages have a place and each culture is necessary and part of our strength. This could show the determination that each will survive and be respected and cherished as a separate entity in a united country.