

*Canadian Flag*

We, Mr. Speaker—and this is an indication of the change I am talking about—who served in the Canadian forces from 1914 to 1918—and I served in both the Canadian and the British forces—knew that whether we were serving in the British forces or in the Canadian forces we served under the union jack, not the Canadian red ensign. None of us saw a Canadian red ensign in those years.

**Mr. Churchill:** That is not right, and you know it.

**Mr. Pearson:** None of us saw a Canadian red ensign in those years.

**Mr. Churchill:** You didn't serve in France, either.

**Mr. Pearson:** No, my service was very undistinguished, I admit; but I served—

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Pearson:**—and I served, as a Canadian, under the union jack and was proud to do so. It was not until 1945, by order in council, that the union jack was replaced by the red ensign as an official flag for Canada. At that time we all remember that a great many sincere people in Canada opposed that change. Many who are now worried about the change from the red ensign were worried about a change from the union jack, but I think we all agree now that this was a desirable and an inevitable stage in our national progression.

What we are doing in regard to the report of this committee is discussing, considering and, I hope, approving a recommendation of a parliamentary committee which is carrying out in its recommendation the injunction of an order in council passed as far back as 1945; and yet we are supposed to have rushed into this matter. I would ask hon. members to remember that this was authorized by order in council, and I do not recall those hon. gentlemen opposite who were in the house at that time taking exception to this action by order in council, not by parliament. The order in council recommended the adoption of the red ensign, a provisional recommendation pending decision by parliament. We are asking parliament in 1964 to take that decision on the basis of a report; not on the basis of a government resolution—that procedure has been altered—but on the basis of a report from one of its own committees in which all parties in this house were represented. Are we now to be refused that right of decision, Mr. Speaker, on grounds that we are ramming this through?

[Mr. Pearson.]

When it was first put forward in 1945 by order in council it was a provisional decision, and we are now asking that this provisional decision be changed to a parliamentary decision in 1964, a parliamentary decision for a Canadian national flag to which the party I have the honour to lead has been dedicated in resolutions at party conventions through two election campaigns as a specific commitment and, unlike other political commitments that I know about, a political commitment to be carried out if possible, or to be attempted if possible within two years of taking office; that is to say by next April. I can imagine the criticism to which we would be subjected in the 1965 session of this parliament if we had not taken that kind of action which we said we would take in a specific time period.

The committee that was set up when the earlier debate on this subject indicated that no easier, quick agreement was going to be reached by a free decision of this house worked hard, effectively and sincerely, and I would like to join others in congratulating its members of all parties and particularly, if I may, its chairman.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Pearson:** Eleven out of the 15 members of that committee accepted the flag design recommended in its report; 11 out of 15. That is 70 per cent, or a little more, of the membership of the parliamentary committee; and among those 11 are representatives of every party in this house including the official opposition.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Pearson:** The right hon. Leader of the Opposition has taken the position that if there had been two more, if there had been 13 out of 15 and not 11, no further debate would have been necessary and the matter could have gone to parliament for a quick decision. If there had been only two more, we would not need a plebiscite.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Pearson:** We would not even need 74 speeches on the report of the committee. No delay would have been required. I am very, very sorry, Mr. Speaker, that the committee was not able to secure those two extra votes. I appreciate, however, the position of those four members who could not accept this recommendation, a position very honestly, sincerely and firmly held. The right hon. gentleman yesterday had something to say about the report of this committee and the