

Flags of Canada

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I caught the headlines and I received letters and newspaper clippings from all parts of Canada. Some of them were not too complimentary. Nevertheless, there was not one that was against the principle of a Canadian national flag.

I am sorry the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herridge) is not in his seat at the moment. I had a letter from the lord Lyon in Edinburgh. He was not suggesting he would design a flag for us, but he suggested that if we did not have a college of heraldry in Canada we should get one because he does work at the moment for governments and private individuals in Canada by way of designing coats of arms, flags, badges and a number of other things. However, be that as it may, I was pleased that the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Regnier) was allowed to present his resolution. I was afraid that perhaps my bill had deprived him of the opportunity of doing so, and that was far from my thoughts. I should like to say that I appreciate the hon. member's sincerity in bringing a measure of this kind to the floor of the house. While there are some things in his motion of which I do not approve, I do not feel it is necessary at this time to put the question to the people in the form of a referendum which suggests the design of the flag.

I feel there has been enough discussion and enough talk on the subject throughout the country. It is a matter for the government to decide. I feel a decision should be taken much in the same way as the bill of rights was decided upon when it went through this house last year. If the government is ready to present a motion in favour of a distinctive Canadian flag, the matter could be studied by a committee of this house and reported upon. I am sure if that were done a satisfactory solution would be brought forward. I have always been very much in favour of a distinctive Canadian flag. I have taken every opportunity to express my views that the time is long past when Canada should have a distinctive flag.

I am not going to repeat the things I said when I presented my bill. However, since that time several things have been brought to my attention by means of letters which I received. It has been brought to my attention, for instance, that at Niagara Falls, which is a border city, there is no Canadian flag of any kind flying over the customs building. There is not even a picture of Her Majesty the Queen in that building. I am not referring to the Peace bridge, which is at Fort Erie, and which is in a little different situation. I am quoting now from a letter I received from an Anglican minister who

[Mr. Smith (Lincoln).]

visited the three bridges, the Rainbow bridge, the lower bridge and the Queenston bridge. He said that at the customs houses at those three bridges he found no sign of any Canadian flag or any pictures of the Queen. You can cross the river to the United States side and find the beautiful stars and stripes flying over the customs building. This flag is lowered each evening, with dignity and according to tradition. Inside the United States customs building, they also have the United States flag. I saw it there myself when I was in the building.

There is no doubt about it that in this country we are losing our appreciation for our flag and even for our national independence. In my opinion there is nothing that portrays the independence or the loyalty of a country as well as a national flag. It is extremely unfortunate at this time that we do not have a national flag. I urge the government to take whatever steps are necessary, by way of bringing in a government bill and setting up a special committee to consider it, in order to give us a national flag for Canada. If this is done, I am sure that everybody will be satisfied.

I think that is all I have to say at this time. Again I express my appreciation to the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Regnier) for bringing this matter to the attention of the house, although I do not entirely approve his motion.

(Translation):

Mr. J. J. Martel (Chapleau): Mr. Speaker, after a long enough debate on this matter, I would not like to take too much of the time of the house. Therefore, I will express my views as briefly as possible and at the same time make some comment which I feel will be of general interest to hon. members.

First of all, I wish to congratulate the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Regnier) for offering this resolution to our discussion and for affording public enlightenment on this matter which has been debated for so many years.

It proposes, of course, a referendum. I am entirely favourable to the principle of that proposal, but I wonder whether it would not be advisable to be more precise and to deal with the heart of the matter with the following question: "Are you in favour of a flag with a green maple leaf on a red and white background?" This being said, Mr. Speaker, I take the liberty of briefly relating with comments the history of this matter of a national flag. This is not the first time such a