

Flags of Canada

Likewise, however, I cannot support the amendment because I believe it is objectionable for the very same reason in that it asks for an expression of opinion with respect to whether citizens are in favour of a distinctive national flag that does not include the emblem of any other country. Surely, Mr. Speaker, that is a limitation that is wholly unnecessary and which in my opinion destroys the objective of the amendment, namely to secure an expression of opinion respecting whether the majority of the people of this nation desire a distinctive national flag.

I for my part am in favour of a distinctive national flag but I cannot say that I would be opposed to including in that flag some emblem that would be significant of our ancestry and of the two nations which have contributed so much to this nation. I therefore believe, as was pointed out by the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Winch), that first and foremost we must put this simple question, are you in favour of a distinctive national flag?

Before I conclude, I should make some reference to the impression which has been left that the red ensign is not in any way distinctive or symbolic of this country. The red ensign certainly is a flag that is distinctive. In my opinion, it is also a flag which is national in this aspect, that it relates to and is symbolic of Canada. It may be slightly confusing when compared with the flags of some other nations of the commonwealth, but certainly no one would say that the red ensign is symbolic of any nation other than Canada. I believe that our armed forces over the years have fought and died under this flag. I do not believe it is mistaken in any way for the flag of any nation other than Canada. I agree also with the hon. member for Vancouver East in his references to the maple leaf. Certainly, over the years the maple leaf has been established as emblematic of Canada.

I suggest that if we get an expression of opinion as to whether Canada should have a distinctive national flag, that expression of opinion would be very strongly in the affirmative. If we were to stop at that point we would have settled nothing. Studies which have been made in regard to a national flag indicated there were some 2,700 different designs. I am quite sure we would never arrive at that degree of unanimity that would enable us to come up with a design that would be supported by the majority of the people to the exclusion of other designs. However, having regard to what I have said about the red ensign, and to what I believe to be a considerable body of opinion in favour of the red ensign, I believe the second question on the referendum should be whether or not you are in favour of the red ensign as a Canadian flag. I know there

[Mr. Spencer.]

is considerable opposition to it, but the suggested referendum in the motion now before us does include the red ensign and I certainly approve of that portion of the resolution.

After having asked for an expression of opinion as to whether there should be a distinctive national flag, the individual as I have said should be asked whether he is in favour of the red ensign. Unless there is a preponderance of opinion in favour of the red ensign, then consideration ought to be given to some design for a Canadian national flag which would attract greater support than may be manifest in so far as the red ensign is concerned.

So, Mr. Speaker, I conclude by saying that I certainly commend the mover and seconder of this resolution upon bringing this matter before the house. I like the idea of a referendum. I believe this is a matter which could better be dealt with by the rank and file of the people. We who sit in this house have our personal ideas in connection with this matter, but we may be a bit prejudiced or a bit biased in our point of view. We should not be unmindful of the fact that it cannot be said this country is composed primarily of people of French or English ancestry. This country is more and more becoming populated by peoples from all parts of the world. Since the last war, there have been over two million immigrants to this country, and we are more and more taking on the aspects of a truly Canadian nationality. I think it is desirable, therefore, that the people as a whole be consulted on this question and given the opportunity, as indicated by this resolution, of expressing their opinion on an important subject which has been bandied about in this house for so many years without any results being achieved. If for no other reason, the mover of this motion should be commended for bringing forth the idea of a referendum, because a referendum will at least represent some progress toward finding a solution to this problem which has been causing so much concern over so many years.

(Translation):

Hon. Lionel Chevrier (Laurier): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a brief contribution to this debate and express some views concerning this resolution.

Let me, first of all, congratulate the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Regnier) for moving this resolution. I should also like to extend the same congratulations to two other members of this house, namely the hon. member for Drummond-Arthabaska (Mr.