

*Canadian Flag*

ing is that the government give the people of Canada the opportunity to indicate whether the government is wrong in its assumption that the people want the one red maple leaf flag, or that we are wrong in assuming that the people of this great nation do not want such a flag. Such a course seems completely justifiable and fair.

We have heard that a plebiscite can be too expensive. We have heard that the mechanics of a plebiscite are such that it would be a cumbersome procedure. We have been told that it is the function of parliament to make decisions, and that there should be no need for a plebiscite. But, Mr. Speaker, are these justifiable arguments to use when we are speaking about the future of our nation, when we are worried about the problems of unity or disunity, when we are dealing with a subject that has so great an emotional impact? Are these arguments not futile? Do they not have the taint of partisan politics? Do government members opposite honestly feel that a plebiscite would not solve this problem, or are they not taking the position that because the opposition has suggested a plebiscite it must necessarily be wrong? Do they feel they should be ashamed if they allow the people of Canada to make a choice? Do they feel that people will look down on them as having retreated from a policy? Is this what the trouble is?

In a situation as serious and important as this, I think any political party on either side of the house that provides a solution as workable, as simple and as conclusive as a plebiscite will serve the nation's interests and carry out the obligation that parliament is established to fulfil. A plebiscite would do something that has been necessary from the very beginning of the discussion of this matter. It would take the problem out of partisan politics where it never should have been put in the first place.

As I said at the outset, Mr. Speaker, I make no apology for taking the time of the house to express my views, because I feel very strongly about this most serious matter. I know the people in Ontario and all the other provinces are really concerned and worked up about this matter. When we go out amongst the people we represent, and I think this is true in every riding in Canada, the people say they are tired of debate; they are tired of the flag question, they want to see an end to it, they want a solution. But, Mr. Speaker, they still take sides; they still have their original convictions. A man who

is a red ensign supporter when asked if we should let it go to a vote and if he would accept the new red maple leaf flag, will invariably answer "Let us settle the issue; let us get on with the business of the nation, but don't dare let them replace the red ensign."

The same situation exists on the other side. The advocates of the maple leaf flag want the issue settled. They feel we are wasting time; but if there were a danger of the issue being settled by the adoption of a compromise flag, the union jack or a red ensign, they would be the first to object. They would say "Keep on with the battle".

This is the position in which we find ourselves. We were at an impasse before, and we are at an impasse now. It is my opinion that the men on the flag committee should have had the fortitude, the diligence or the courage to set aside partisan politics, to set aside outside influences, to start thinking about Canada as a nation and come up with a compromise flag that included all the basic principles. What a golden opportunity, Mr. Speaker, they had to go down in the history of this nation as statesmen. This was not done, and it is most unfortunate that it was not.

Here we are. We must ask for a plebiscite. I must ask for a plebiscite. The people I represent are overwhelmingly in favour of being given an opportunity to make their wishes known. There is one other factor that we have in a plebiscite. There is always the basic fear that if a government promoted flag becomes the standard of the nation and the government should change in the years ahead, then since a precedent has been set the same dreary process could be gone through again to change the Canadian flag. It is true that after the experience of this parliament no government in power would be likely to attempt such a step. However, the mechanics of our system do lend themselves to such an event taking place.

It is my opinion, Mr. Speaker, that this government should allow a plebiscite. Then this matter would be taken out of partisan politics, not only for today but in the future as well. Once a majority of the people say "This is our flag", there would be no attempt by any political party, short of a revolution, to make a change.

It is for this reason I find it difficult to understand why we are running into opposition when we make this request of the government to have a plebiscite. Let the people decide. Let the people vote. We on this side