

Canadian Flag

would have been plenty of time to deal with the flag resolution next fall or next winter.

I wish to say a word, too, about the government's method of introducing this measure. I recognize that this is a difficult matter to deal with. I think the government would have been well advised to select two or three designs and submit them to a joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate in the hope that some measure of agreement could be reached. This might have prevented the selection of a flag from becoming a partisan issue or being involved in political diatribes. Normally, when a government is a majority government, a decision of this nature can be made by the government members, but the present government is a minority government and surely it would have made sense in this situation to have attempted to reach some all-party agreement.

I think the government further confused the matter by putting both the question of the distinctive national flag and the retention of the union jack as a symbol of our relationship to the commonwealth and our loyalty to the crown in the same resolution. I feel, Mr. Speaker, all of us are indebted to you for separating the two questions. I believe this gives every member a chance to stand up and be counted on each issue so there can be no opportunity for equivocation or misrepresentation.

It has been moved by the Conservative party that we should refer this matter to the people of Canada in a plebiscite. I am free to confess that when this was a matter of academic discussion I would have had considerable sympathy for this approach. I think now, Mr. Speaker, the time for a plebiscite is long past. Opinion in Canada has now polarized around two flag designs, the red ensign and a maple leaf design, and I do not think we would do any great service to Canada by submitting this question to a national referendum. We would in effect have a miniature general election and, as the right hon. Leader of the Opposition is himself quoted as saying in a C.B.C. radio and television interview last Wednesday, "To have an election on the basis of a matter like this will divide this country as it has not been divided in the past".

I think all the arguments against having an election on such an emotionally charged issue apply equally to having a referendum at this particular stage. Anyone who witnessed the confrontation on parliament hill when the proponents of the red ensign and the proponents of the maple leaf design faced each other across a cement sidewalk, and

[Mr. Douglas.]

heard some of the comments that were made, must realize that this situation, in a more inflammatory form, would be re-enacted in a thousand communities in Canada. I think we would only inflame passions, we would only increase national disunity, and we would do a great disservice to the people of Canada by having a referendum at this time. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I am doubtful now that a referendum would settle anything. It would show us what people think in particular localities. I doubt that it would give us a consensus of national opinion. In the final analysis parliament itself would still have to deal with the matter. I think, therefore, that parliament has the responsibility to deal with it now.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Douglas: I would have preferred that this matter be left, as I have said, until we had dealt with more important issues on the order paper. But now that the government has precipitated it into the House of Commons I say that parliament must accept its responsibility; parliament must make the decision as to what national flag this country will adopt. This is our task. I do not think we can shirk it or pass it on to anyone else.

The third thing I want to say something about, Mr. Speaker, is the actual design of the flag itself. I have a good deal of sympathy for those who advocate selecting the red ensign, with some modification, as the national flag of Canada. As one who was born in Scotland I have a deep attachment for British traditions and British institutions, I would be very happy, personally, with a flag in which there was the union jack in one corner and the fleur-de-lis in another, thus paying tribute to the two great founding races that came together to make up the partnership of confederation. But, Mr. Speaker, we are not selecting a flag for my personal preference or for anyone else's personal preference. We are trying to select a flag that will speak for the people of Canada as a whole. We are not selecting a flag for this particular generation alone. We are seeking to select a flag design that will have meaning for our generation and for all the other generations of Canadians who will come after us.

I think we have to recognize that the maple leaf design is the flag best calculated to do that.

We must remember that there are over 5 million Canadians who are of neither British nor French origin. For them neither the union