

*Flags of Canada*

it was our imperative duty, above everything else, to be Canadians worthy of the name.

Today, however more than ever before, we must realize that the prejudices we had yesterday have disappeared, that our conflicting opinions are not as far apart as they were in the past, and that due to our better understanding of that nature of true Canadianism, we are about to fully agree on the matter.

In 1945, Mr. MacKenzie King, then prime minister of Canada, surely with a view to please an increasingly wide-awake public opinion, promised, during the election campaign which was to bring him back to power, to have a national flag adopted by parliament. Moreover, the same promise was to be found in the speech from the throne of that year delivered at the opening of the first session of the new parliament.

That same year, a joint committee of the Senate and of the House of Commons was appointed to study and report on the choice of an appropriate and distinctive design for a national flag for Canada. Twelve members of the Senate and 25 members of the House of Commons were on that committee. They represented various political groups.

The setting up of that joint committee of both houses aroused a keen interest among the Canadian community; from all over the country, Canadians of all racial origins sent to that committee designs they thought should be accepted as our distinctive symbol.

By May 9, 1946, 2,409 different designs had been laid before the committee and the great majority of them positively indicated that our proposed national flag should bear no symbol of a country other than ours, in spite of the fact that the two most important racial groups in Canada still had ties, though remote ties, with Great Britain and France. In order to prove the truth of the statement I am making, which, moreover, the debates of that time will bear out, let me say that of the 2,409 designs proposed, 1,611 had the maple leaf as only symbol, 383 had the union jack, 231 had stars while 184 designs suggested the fleur-de-lis.

In 1946, Mr. Speaker, a movement of sound Canadianism could already be felt all across the country. The great majority of Canadians already recognized the importance of showing our maturity and independence in that respect. More than 15 years ago, Mr. Speaker, Canadians of all origins, increasingly proud of their country, wanted to show their pride

in being first and foremost Canadians. The heartening development I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks had made itself felt in an unequivocal way.

Unfortunately, after two years of discussions, the committee that had been formed to study and report on the question, had failed to reach unanimity on the choice of a distinctive flag for Canada. As we all know, the whole thing was to be forgotten, to the great dismay of the majority of well-thinking Canadians.

In 1948, Mr. Louis St. Laurent, not only assumed the leadership of the Liberal party, but also assumed the important functions of prime minister. This was sufficient to revive the question of a national flag. On all sides, constant pressures were made urging the new chief of state to re-establish the joint committee and to give our country as soon as possible a distinctive national flag, the symbol of our legitimate pride and of our absolute sovereignty.

Mr. Speaker, it is six o'clock.

(Text):

At six o'clock the house took recess.

**AFTER RECESS**

The house resumed at 8 p.m.

(Translation):

**Mr. Belzile:** If you will allow me, Mr. Speaker, I should like to resume the speech I had begun before recess.

In the face of an aroused and constantly alert public opinion, Mr. Louis St. Laurent, as leader of the government and of the Liberal party, on the opening of the election campaign in Winnipeg, in 1949, undertook to give our country a distinct national emblem which would be the glory of all Canadians. More than 3,000 persons were present at that meeting, including some members who are now sitting in this house. The newspapers of the time did not fail to report the prime minister's words. However, that formal promise, which all Canadians generally and the Liberals in particular had warmly applauded, was, once again, to fall by the wayside along with many unfulfilled Liberal promises. Since then and until 1957, while the people showed their disapproval, our friends opposite and their predecessors deliberately forgot that promise, and left in the limbo of oblivion the joint committee they themselves had set up and then buried.