

Canadian Flag

minister and the terms of the resolution, which asks that the government be authorized to take such steps as may be necessary to establish officially the flag of Canada. I am sure I can join with the previous member who spoke in saying that there must be some recourse to the people of Canada, because certainly the government has not taken the option which has presented itself.

I read into the record the Queen's prerogative. This has not been considered at all, and it seems to me it is only fair that the government should use every available opportunity and every channel to make sure that the people of Canada are given a fair voice in what will be a national symbol for many years to come. It is beyond me why the government are reticent to take this step. Surely if the government is sure of its judgment it should not be afraid to call a plebiscite at a suitable time, which of course would be at the time of the next election. On that occasion the government would be able to judge by the results of the plebiscite whether or not they were justified in their actions.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would only say that the situation which we are presenting gives the government that alternative. It gives the people of Canada a choice and it will destroy forever the statements, or the thoughts which are behind the statements, that what we have today is a political flag.

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington South): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the amendment before this Chamber, which asks the government to hold a plebiscite whereby the people of Canada would have the opportunity at the next federal election to express their views on the adoption of a distinctive flag for Canada. Before I commence my remarks, Mr. Speaker, may I congratulate you on reaching the very difficult decision you had to make—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I think in the present circumstances no reference at all should be made to the Speaker. I hope there will be no bad references, but there do not have to be any good ones either.

Mr. Hales: I bow to your ruling, Mr. Speaker, and will proceed with my remarks.

I should like to say at the outset that the hon. member for Kootenay East (Mr. Byrne) will not have occasion to accuse me of reading from notes because I will try to keep away from notes as much as possible; I intend to speak from the heart. I intend to speak on behalf of the conscience of thousands of people in my riding—yes, millions of people

[Mr. Ormiston.]

in Canada—who want a chance to express their views by means of a plebiscite. I plead for them, Mr. Speaker. These people have a right to be heard, in my opinion, and I think it is up to the government to provide them with the opportunity to say which flag they prefer. This may be my last opportunity to speak on behalf of these people, so before this government pulls down the Canadian red ensign, which has stood for so much—honour, history, love, sentiment and tradition—and replace it with another flag, I would beg the government to let the people make their choice. Whatever steps are taken, or whatever choice is made we should remind ourselves that it will be made for our children and our children's children, and will be our flag for centuries and centuries to come.

This is an emotional matter involving a moral and personal choice, and with all the power and persuasion at my command I plead with this government, and particularly the Prime Minister, to let the conscience of the people of Canada be heard. Let us have a plebiscite at the next election. It would not be costly and could be handled very easily, allowing the people of this country an opportunity to express their views. I am sure the Canadian people feel that this debate has lasted long enough. The public polls which have been held in recent days indicate that over 60 per cent of the people want a plebiscite. Why do they want a plebiscite? I suggest it is because they desire an opportunity to express their views and because they want this flag question taken from the House of Commons.

It is within the power of the Prime Minister to remove this question from this chamber and allow the people to voice an opinion by plebiscite. He brought this flag question into the house and he is the man who can take it out. We as the opposition did not bring this subject before parliament. I am sure that every loyal Canadian, given the chance to express an opinion, would accept a choice made by a plebiscite. Why does the Prime Minister delay putting this question to the people in the form of a plebiscite? Important business which this house should now be considering, such as the labour code legislation, implementation of the Gill report recommendations, pension and railway legislation and all the other important matters could then be dealt with.

There are those who will ask why a plebiscite is necessary. The hon. member for York East (Mr. Otto) just asked whether we