

*Canadian Flag*

The Royal Canadian Legion, dominion command, passed the following resolution in 1958, at which time I stood behind it 100 per cent:

Be it resolved that this convention requests the federal government to place the selection of a Canadian national flag before the people in the form of a referendum or plebiscite, using

- (a) the flag recommended in the majority report of the parliamentary committee of July 1946;
- (b) the flag recommended in the minority report of the same committee.

From time to time, Mr. Speaker, we have had requests concerning a referendum or a plebiscite. The red ensign, which after all is a distinctive flag, to me at any rate, has been my choice since the first great war, at which time I had the honour of serving my country. During the second world war a son of mine did likewise and I now have two sons carrying on this fine tradition in the Scots Fusiliers.

Further on in my remarks I will dwell on the red ensign and explain why I think it should be retained as the national flag of Canada, which is my right as a citizen of this great country. According to this resolution, we as members of this house are asked to decide on a new distinctive flag and in so doing to express our views and those of our constituents. This is not a party political question at all. It is one which concerns the very soul of the nation. It is one upon which every Canadian is entitled to have a say now that the government has insisted that it is an urgent national question. If Canadians are not prepared to act in defence of the symbols of their heritage today, they are inviting destruction of that very heritage tomorrow.

I believe that to ask hon. members to make a decision on behalf of their constituents in this regard is one of the most unfair procedures to which members could be subjected, as we well realize that people are divided on this question. In some areas you may have 60 per cent of the people in favour of the retention of the red ensign, and vice-versa in other areas. In voting on this important question we are really only speaking for those whose opinion may coincide with ours.

It has been suggested that a free vote of members of parliament and senators be allowed. Even with such a vote there would be a natural tendency, human nature being what it is, for government supporters to vote for the government's own design, and it is far from certain that a parliamentary vote on an issue of this nature would accurately reflect the feelings of all the people of Can-

[Mr. Weichel.]

ada. If such a referendum or plebiscite were held the ballot could contain reproductions side by side in full colour of the Canadian red ensign and the flag design sponsored by the government and under each design could be a square in which the voter could record his preference by merely writing an X.

I do not know the exact rules when asking for a referendum or plebiscite, but in regard to choosing a new flag or continuing with the red ensign may I make the suggestion that we should debate this resolution so that every member may have an opportunity to express his views and that after the debate is completed an educational campaign, like the one suggested by the former prime minister, Mr. King, be carried on in order to supply information as to the full meaning and history of the flag to every citizen in Canada, for their study and consideration. When the next election is held a plebiscite could also be included so that people could then vote according to their convictions. In this way we would have the personal opinion of every Canadian.

In an editorial in *The Legionary* of May, 1964, the following article appeared:

In a free democratic country, where public opinion is neither regimented nor suppressed, instances occur when people are stirred to the innermost depths of heart and soul. Then it is that government by the people, for the people, is given true effect by a national vote on the issue at stake.

Mr. E. V. Heesaker, dominion president of the Canadian corps association, must have provided the Prime Minister with a lot of food for thought when in a telegram on Tuesday, May 19, 1964, he had this to say:

Surely the present government's memory is not so poor that it cannot recall April, 1942, when your political party then in power asked the Canadian people through a national plebiscite to relieve them of an election promise of 1940 not to draft men for overseas service. We would respectfully point out, Mr. Prime Minister, that if an election promise by your political party then was reversed by a national plebiscite, why cannot your election promise of 1963 re a new Canadian flag be similarly acted upon?

I would wholeheartedly support such a plebiscite and would abide by whatever decision was reached, as would all Canadians of good will and moderation. As I previously mentioned, how can 265 members of parliament deal fairly with such an important question when voting for over 19 million people? After all, I feel that such a plebiscite is just as important as the one on conscription during the second world war.