

Canadian Flag

Mr. Horner (The Battlefords): Hon. members opposite applaud; but they are still afraid of the plebiscite. They have tried to ram this thing through parliament, with the worst possible diplomatic sense. I am surprised at our Prime Minister and hope he will retreat in this connection before it is too late.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Bow River.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Fisher: Glad to see you back.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, I hope the spirit that is supposed to govern us at this time of the year governs the debate tonight. I noticed that the hon. member for Port Arthur (Mr. Fisher) welcomed me back. I was in that part of the country—may I say this in an introductory way—where there does not seem to be very much support for the New Democratic party. I think they had 3 per cent of the vote in my riding, and I do not believe it is going to increase next time. But I did not intend to get rude or personal. I had hoped that the spirit of the debate would be like the spirit of Christmas; and when I speak of spirit I do not refer to that which perhaps some people indulged in during the supper hour. I have not yet spoken one word in this debate on the flag.

An hon. Member: Oh, oh.

Mr. Woolliams: Somebody says "Oh", but the record will bear me out. I would like to say, let us make certain that we know the issue that is before the house right now. The question before the house is a motion to adopt the committee report and an amendment thereto as to whether we should have a plebiscite. You may rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that the remarks I have scribbled out on paper will be directed to that issue.

I might say that one reason I have not previously made a speech on the flag—and I trust I will receive the attention of the house—is because I am one of those—and perhaps I need some sympathy in this regard from some of my friends from French Quebec; I do not know—who has been steeped in British tradition. My family came to Alberta four generations ago and I was steeped in British tradition. When one is dealing with any kind of tradition, be it French tradition, British tradition, Ukrainian tradition or German tradition, he sometimes tends to speak with a certain degree of prejudice. It is for

[Mr. Horner (The Battlefords).]

that reason that up to now I have refrained from making any remarks in this debate.

My first question is this. Why, as a member of the Conservative party, would I not vote tonight for the adoption of the report? I have given this matter serious thought, the people of my constituency of Bow River have given it serious thought and the people of western Canada have given it some serious thought. The reason I cannot, in all fairness with my conscience, vote for the adoption of the report tonight is the fact, and I say this with all seriousness, that if we are changing the flag we now have, surely the people of this country—and I am going to have something to say about that in a few moments—should be able to make known their views in this regard. We know what the Telepolls and the Gallup polls have said; we know that some 50 per cent of the people of this country would like to have a plebiscite. With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I felt it my duty to speak tonight on a matter I have refrained from speaking on previously.

I would remind the house that we have now been sitting for 206 days. I would also remind the house that the debate on the flag last summer lasted only 20 days. There may be a place—and I am one of those who believe this—for a filibuster; but I do not believe that on such an emotional and important question as the flag itself and its symbols, which stand for liberty and freedom as we know it, or our traditions, 20 days of debate and the few days we have taken on this occasion is a real filibuster, when we have sat in parliament for 206 days. A message has been got across to the people of this country, as I found out when I was absent from the house. The hon. member for Port Arthur brought this to my attention. During the time I was absent from the house for a week I made four or five speeches in the province of Alberta and one in another province. We have been told that the people of this country believe this parliament has become a decadent institution because all we have discussed during the 206 days has been the matter of a flag. I felt, after listening to the message of the people, that it is time somebody set the thing in its proper perspective and pointed out that there has been no filibuster on the flag.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Woolliams: They laugh, Mr. Speaker. One tenth of the time has been spent on this question. Can we call that a filibuster? I say, and I am not ashamed to say it, that there are great issues in this country and when