

Private Members' Business

There are so many factory closures and unemployment and we get a private member's bill on a flag as a priority from this Parliament. This country has a crisis in education. Do we get a bill about retraining workers, especially young people? No, we get a bill on the flag and the Criminal Code. Do we get proposals to help put young people back to work? No. This country has a crisis in its health care system. Do we get a far-sighted measure, a private member's bill that would deal with that issue? No, we get a bill about a flag.

It is said that patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels. I am not saying the member for Scarborough East is a scoundrel. In fact, he is a very gentle and good man in all the dealings I have with him including a television debate on this very issue. I know he is trying to do the right thing.

I say to the hon. member, to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the country that Canadians are looking to us for leadership. Is this really the kind of leadership we want to give? This is easy to do.

That is why we had quick unanimous consent because it is unthinking and not really getting to the root of the problems in this country. Indeed, it has some negative implications and the bill itself is unclear.

This is not going to help our police. This is going to hurt our police and make more work for them. I look at the amendments in the bill. We have to look at what is a public place. If it happens in a mall, is that a public place? It may be defined in certain instances that it is a public place and in other instances that it is a private place. For example, for labour demonstrations a mall has been defined as a private place.

The second amendment is for the purpose of desecration. What if the flag is torn? What will happen? The poor police will have to go to a demonstration where some kid rips or burns the flag in the height of the demonstration.

Mr. Bjornson: You think young children should do that?

Mr. Waddell: It will be a young person who some day may be prime minister when he grows up and matures and becomes more acceptable. He is angry. He is young. He is at a demonstration and this goes on. These

demonstrations happen and they go away. It is called free speech. That is what we call it in Canada and in democracies. That is what it is about.

The police will now have to go and charge this guy.

Mr. Crawford: And so they should.

Mr. Waddell: They will go to court. It will cost the taxpayers money. This is for the purpose of desecration. The Crown will have to prove that he intended to desecrate the flag. It will go on and on and on. Some will be convicted, most will be acquitted. They may be overruled by the Supreme Court. As my hon. friend from the Liberal Party pointed out the Supreme Court of the United States overruled it. The Supreme Court of Canada may overrule it.

We are going to be in all this mess. For what? To show that we are patriotic?

I believe those of us who oppose this bill are patriotic as the hon. member from the Liberal Party said. The hon. member who is making comments will get his chance. He can get up after me and speak on this bill. He can just listen for a moment. To be patriotic, the flag does not have to be worn on one's sleeve. I am an immigrant and deeply believe in this country. I have travelled all around the world with a Canadian flag and I believe in it.

We have a more mature level of nationalism than the United States for example. We have always seen it as a more chauvinistic country where there are these kinds of laws. In Canada, we are more mature. We do not have to wear our nationalism. It is there. It is deep. We do not need laws to show we are chauvinistic and we have to protect our flag.

• (1130)

The reason Canadians like the flag and the reason it is respected is because Canada has respectful policies around the world, for example, our peacekeeping role to which all have agreed in this House and has been implemented by all parties. We have had some differences in our foreign policy, but by and large we have had a progressive foreign policy in this country. We have a social safety net and we try as best as possible not to have homeless people in the streets or sick people not getting medicare.