

Canadian Flag

Mr. Woolliams: I must confess, Mr. Speaker, you are always more gracious than I appear to be, and I appreciate your courtesy in this regard. In summary I would say there was never a true mandate given so far as the flag is concerned, and the Canadian people are entitled to a plebiscite. When we hear it said, "Let parliament speak" I am afraid of that because it will speak for only a minority of the people, not because this is a minority government but because hon. members opposite will be speaking for a minority of people in their ridings.

I would ask hon. members to give this serious thought because the Conservative party can only fight this so long. The red ensign may come down on every flagpole in Canada. I would like to be standing in some of the ridings with certain hon. members when that happens. Now I want to end with a little poem.

Mr. Knowles: Author?

Mr. Woolliams: The author is Eldon Woolliams. It is only four lines but I wrote it in all seriousness:

God and the soldier all men adore
In time of trouble—and no more,
For when war is over, and all things
righted,
God is neglected—and the old soldier
slighted.

Remember that under our flag the liberty and freedom of this country were fought for and maintained by men who gave their lives, and by some who are still with us today and who gave their health.

Mr. D. M. Fisher (Port Arthur): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a small contribution to the debate. I have been somewhat confused by the use which the official opposition makes of the results of Telepoll in connection with the idea of having a plebiscite. I am rather bothered by it because it was only a week or two ago that the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. Churchill), their house leader, was raising questions with regard to this particular program and the questions that it asked.

It is quite true that a week ago Sunday this program reported that it had asked some 1,100 people in major cities across the country whether they would like to have a chance to vote on the flag, in other words a plebiscite, and a majority said they would.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Fisher: I am very pleased hon. members have that much confidence in Telepoll and its surveys, because I do not have that much.

Hon. members may wonder why. Just a week before that Telepoll conducted a survey in which it reviewed parliamentary troubles and the fact that we seem to be having difficulties with parliament. It gave the case for Mr. Pearson and the case for Mr. Diefenbaker and then asked this question, "Whose side are you on, Mr. Pearson's or Mr. Diefenbaker's?" Hon. members on the Conservative side should remember that the results were much stronger for Mr. Pearson than they were for Mr. Diefenbaker.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Fisher: I suggest that the great faith they put in Telepoll indications in favour of a plebiscite should be immensely weakened, unless they are prepared to accept the result of the poll of the previous week which indicated that the Canadian people are overwhelmingly on the side of the Prime Minister and are overwhelmingly against the Leader of the Opposition in so far as their attitude to parliament is concerned. I just felt I should draw this to the attention of hon. members, since so many of them have used this argument in favour of a plebiscite.

The other point I want to talk about is that a number of hon. gentlemen have tended to speak as veterans and legionnaires and the last hon. gentleman who spoke suggested that by voting for a new flag and having the red ensign come down we would in a sense be doing a disservice and acting disgracefully to the memory of legionnaires and veterans. I do not think that those of us who want a new flag should stand up and pound our chests about the fact that we served during the war, but I would like to tell members of the official opposition that a great many people who belong to the Canadian Legion do not accept the Legion's stand for the red ensign. I am one of them. I can tell hon. members of one Legion post in my riding which has 127 members. The secretary tried to get up a petition to support the Legion's stand on the red ensign but he could only get 26 signatures out of a membership of 127.

I want to make it very clear to members of the official opposition that I think they are being extremely unfair in wrapping themselves in a patriotic and chauvinistic sort of label in this whole question about the flag. We happen to feel, whether we are veterans or not, that we owe no apology to anyone in suggesting a new flag.

I want to touch on another point made by the official opposition which says that in