

*Canadian Flag*

arrived at, we would not be sitting here tonight debating the flag. Reluctant as some of us may have been to accept that decision, we would have accepted the decision of the majority of the Canadian people.

We are now charged with delay, with filibustering, and so on and so forth. There are two answers regarding whether there has been delay; and undoubtedly there has been a protracted debate. The first answer, which was referred to by my hon. friend who has just taken his seat and I am sure it has also been mentioned many times—one cannot help speaking in this debate without referring to the arguments advanced by other speakers—is that this is an emotional matter, as everyone in this house realizes, and because of the feelings of one's own constituents one has to speak and express one's views.

But this flag issue should never have been brought into parliament at this time. There is no reason in the world why, in the middle of a legislative program which had been outlined to us, the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) should throw in this flag issue, just as though he had thrown the overalls into Mrs. Murphy's chowder—and it has created almost as bad a smell. That is one reason for this protracted debate at this time.

Having brought in this issue, disrupted parliament without any authority or mandate and, I say kindly, without any judgment, we have had this issue thrown at us by this government; yet when we ask that the Canadian people be given a chance to express an opinion, we are denied that request, at least up to now. I would judge from the way in which hon. members opposite treat this amendment, that it is their intention to vote it down, so that we will have no plebiscite granted to the Canadian people on this matter.

Those are two reasons for this long debate and delay. If this plebiscite had been accepted I am sure the prolonged debate would not have taken place, but that the issue could have been decided within a few days rather than in as many weeks. Under those circumstances the responsibility for any delay which may have occurred rests squarely on the shoulders of members opposite, and particularly on the shoulders of the right hon. Prime Minister, who has projected this flag debate at this time, disrupting the whole procedure of Canadian parliament. This is a highly emotional issue which has disrupted the nation and created difficulty for each and every one of us in our constituencies and in our own hearts and minds. We have been asked to deal with this issue in short order and pro-

[Mr. Nowlan.]

duce a flag by Christmas. The people of Canada do not appreciate having a flag rammed down their throats in the way in which this matter has been handled.

We have been given reasons why a plebiscite cannot be held. We have been told that in the first place a plebiscite is contrary to Canadian practice and procedure. Some of us here, and certainly one or two members opposite, yesterday took part in the Ottawa civic elections as ratepayers and voters. What did we vote for at that time? We voted for individuals, and also as to whether there should be fluoridation. Surely that was a referendum, and is a referendum not a form of a plebiscite? We also voted as to whether or not there should be Sunday sports. Was that not a plebiscite? We are told that a plebiscite is contrary to Canadian practice. That is nonsense, when right here in this city gentlemen on that side as well as on this side took part in a referendum or plebiscite—call it what you will. There is no basis for the suggestion that a plebiscite is contrary to Canadian practice.

We are told that we cannot depart from accepted practice; but what is this government doing? It is departing from accepted practice in every piece of legislation it proposes. What is co-operative federalism except departure from an accepted practice? What about the various other matters which have been brought before this house? Certainly to some extent they have been departures from ordinary practice. Surely pension bill No. 1, No. 2, No. 3 and, I suppose, No. 4, if that is a matter still on the back burner, are departures from the accepted practice of this parliament. I suggest there is absolutely no justification for the argument that we cannot hold a plebiscite because it is contrary to the ordinary and conventional practice of this country.

We have also been told that a plebiscite would be disruptive of national unity. National unity is something very near to the minds and hearts I am sure of all members of this house. I wonder whether one promotes national unity by injecting a highly emotional and disruptive issue of this kind at this time and in this manner into the business of parliament, while at the same time suggesting that by holding a plebiscite the national unity would be disrupted. This is being done at a time when members of this house do not have the authority or a mandate to decide that such and such a flag shall be adopted as the national flag of Canada. Surely that method of procedure is not conducive to the attain-