

Canadian Flag

congratulations to the hon. member for this brilliant feat.

[Text]

Mr. Webb: I want to thank the hon. member for those congratulations and I shall look forward to hearing his speech on the flag.

Mr. Grégoire: I will vote on it.

Mr. Webb: Such action as is contemplated by the government would be very serious to this Canada of ours, to its history and geography, its economic and trading position, its status as a world power, its people, culture and way of life as well as its traditions. Up to the time this government came into power the Anglo-French heritage was one of the most important distinguishing features of our country. The two cultures existing side by side—

Some hon. Members: Order, order.

Mr. Webb:—each maintaining—

Mr. Speaker: Order; I am sure the hon. member realizes that the two cultures are very interesting, especially to me. Nevertheless, "plebiscite" can be translated into either English or French, and the same principle applies either in English or in French. Let us speak about the plebiscite.

Mr. Webb: I am not quite clear on your ruling, Mr. Speaker. The two cultures existed side by side, at all times believing in a plebiscite, and each maintaining a distinct identity and each complementing and contributing to the other. The other ethnic groups have made and are making increasing contributions of their own. Areas in Ontario have been settled by the Germans and Dutch. There are large Ukrainian communities in the western provinces.

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already indicated to the hon. member that, while this is extremely interesting, it is not on the subject. Surely, after a mild suggestion like that the hon. member will confine his remarks to the plebiscite.

Mr. Webb: I believe, Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of latitude granted to the many speakers who have preceded me.

While Canada is physically part of the new world it has never cut its ties with the old world. Through thick and thin Canadians have maintained their democratic way of life. Democracy and equality go hand in hand.

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Some hon. Members: Order, order.

Mr. Webb: You cannot believe in one without believing in the other. At this time, what is more democratic than deciding on a major issue in this country. When you are denying the Canadian people a vote, Mr. Speaker, there is neither democracy nor equality.

There are many other fine qualities in a democracy, such as ideals, honour, loyalty, which are precious and must be protected with great care. This is what the Progressive Conservative party is trying to do today. If these qualities are not protected they will be broken as a result of careless handling, such as is the case in this flag debate. It is a matter of regret that a truly secret ballot could not be taken in this house. I am certain that if this were done the outcome would be different. It is no secret that this issue is tearing at the very heartstrings of many hon. members opposite. Those members, as well as some cabinet ministers, are suffering a great deal; their own consciences tells them they should support the plebiscite, and yet they are faced with party loyalty. It is difficult to understand why the government cannot agree to have a plebiscite at the next general election. The House of Commons, and especially the government, would win praise from many people who at this moment have lost complete confidence in their administration.

Perhaps at this time it would be well to put on the record some remarks made by someone outside our country. Sometimes we are put to shame by the recognition which other nations give to their appreciation of the heritage they have received from Britain. A few years ago Richard Nixon, then vice president of the United States, said this:

No people in history owe more of their heritage to another than the American people to the British.

He cited the English language, the common law and parliament, freedom of speech, assembly, press and religion, as Britain's proud legacy to the nations of the world. He went further and stressed how his country had benefited by British capital investment when the United States was an undeveloped country.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Surely, the hon. member will endeavour to stick to the amendment to the motion which deals with a plebiscite.

Mr. Webb: Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the whole of the debate, and as I said before a great deal of latitude was allowed