

Government Orders

● (1805)

We talk about freedom and powers that MPs have and do not have. Maybe MPs do not use all the power they have, but they have power in this House and to state the opposite is simply incorrect.

We are talking about recall in this whole business. Does anyone realize what the whole process of recall would do to the freedom of a member of Parliament? If I were under threat from my own riding association for leaving my party to be recalled and lose my seat in Parliament, would that give me more freedom as an MP? No, that would mean I would be subject to even greater pressure from my colleagues. How much of that has been considered by those proposing recall? I submit not much thinking went into that particular proposition.

We are talking about voting only as it reflects the aspirations of our constituents. I have been elected to this place three times, to the provincial legislature of my province once, to municipal council three times. I was fortunate and blessed by having received the support of my electors on seven different occasions in my life. I think I have done a few things which people might consider controversial. I have not always voted according to the wishes of the majority of my constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I think you will have some understanding for this but I voted against abortion in this House. Was that the reflection of the majority of my constituents? Probably not. When I voted against capital punishment was that according to the wishes of the majority of my constituents? Probably not. And when I made very strong pronouncements against euthanasia probably the same logic applies.

However in every case I made copies of my speeches and sent them to every single constituent in my riding. I stood by what I had said and stood there to be judged later by my constituents about what I had said. That is what it is all about. It is being accountable to those who sent us here and not necessarily always voting in the manner that 50.1 per cent of the people advocate.

We are debating changing the rules of this House, rules that have existed in one form or another and in this Parliament or the mother of Parliaments for probably about 1,500 years dating from the period of Saxon-Wettins through the Norman invasion of Britain and then through all the changes that occurred. Then there are those forms we have adopted here and modified for our own use. We have to remember that there is a reason those rules have evolved. Yes, they can be updated. Yes, they can be improved. Yes, they can be modernized. Yes, they can be liberalized. Yes, we can do all those things to those rules. But let us remember why they are there.

On the confidence convention, I saw someone resurrecting the ghost of William Lyon Mackenzie earlier today. Is that not interesting. William Lyon Mackenzie and Louis Joseph Papi-neau both fought for the institution of responsible government.

Both fought for the institution whereby there would be confidence votes so that the government could be accountable to the legislature. The member for Calgary Southwest had the right argument but was making it in reverse, unless I have totally forgotten everything I learned in history and I do not believe that I have.

I say that having a system known as responsible government means to have a vote of confidence. It means ultimately that the government in this Chamber is accountable to all of us, where at one point we can all say or have the right to say that we can turf the government out right in here. That is an ultimate power few legislators have. What does it do? What kind of pressure does that put on our government, to say that it has to be accountable to all of us, that all of us have that great power over the government? I suggest to you that it can make government listen to those who were sent here to represent the people of this great country.

● (1810)

Let us change this institution, let us modernize it, but let us be careful as well that we do not destroy it in our zeal to make it better.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu): Mr. Speaker, let me congratulate the member on his speech. I cannot wait to see if he will say the same thing in a month or two, when the Minister of Finance will have presented his budget, when he will have tabled a bill changing the unemployment insurance program, when he will have modified projects in a way that will totally run counter to what he advocated when he was sitting here on the opposition side and, defending his principles, shouted down the government.

Will he have the same courage then? Will he uphold the same principles? When one crosses the floor of the House, one generally receives a sort of electrical jolt and sometimes red books, like the one you mentioned earlier, become blue. That is why I am eager to see what will happen; I certainly urge the member to stick to what he just said.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, since I do not have a good memory for historical events in this House, the member opposite certainly remembers the blue books better than I do. After all, he is the one who sat as a Tory in the House, not me.

Nevertheless, I do not claim that—and I do not want the member to suggest that I do—my government, the Canadian government will never be at fault and will make no mistake. Of course not. Nobody is perfect. What is important to know is whether the government is acting in the best interests of Canadians, not whether it is going to give a new grant to my riding or to that of the member opposite. The government is here for the common good, and I know that our Prime Minister, our government, intend to do just that. As I said before, if the government does not behave in a fair, honourable and account-