

the government cannot lose votes. If it does it must resign, either forcing an election or putting the Governor General into the position of calling on someone else to see if she or he can form a government.

Intellectually, we all know this is nonsense. Yet it is the practice followed in this House, and my motion would narrowly define the confidence convention. The result of a narrow definition of this convention should be that members, especially government backbench members, should feel freed from the strictures of party discipline to occasionally vote against the party line.

In fact, the beneficial effect of this motion applies to all members, both government and opposition. Government members would feel free to vote against the party line because losing an occasional vote will not mean the defeat of the government. Once this type of thinking is understood by the party leadership, those voting against the party line should also not be subject to retribution or punishment. At the same time we in opposition should feel free to vote with the government members from time to time. The government cannot always be wrong, even this government. It is incumbent on us in opposition to recognize this fact and from time to time vote with the government even though our party leadership may try to convince us otherwise. I also want to make it clear that I am speaking about freer voting and not the declaration of free votes which is done under the direction of party leadership.

• (1115)

Finally, why or when would the break come with party discipline? My motion reads that it would be done "to fully represent their constituents' views". This is one example of when it may be done but there are others. However, I want to deal with the issue of representing constituents' views because there seems to be a lack of understanding of the position of the Reform Party on this matter. Let me be very clear.

Unlike some elections in the past, the 1993 election was significant in that the three recognized parties that are now in the House set out for Canadians platforms which to a great extent detailed how the parties would deal with the major issues as these issues presented themselves in the fall of 1993.

They were what Canadians voted for when they voted on October 25, 1993. To a great extent, we believe that when an issue arises which was in the party platform then the member is obligated to vote the party line. I could argue that the Liberal red book may be long on theory and grandiose but very short on implementation plans and there is room for departure from the party line. However, I am not here to discuss Liberal Party policies.

Private Members' Business

My main point is that issues will come along which are new, issues which are not found or addressed in party platforms. Two such issues come quickly to mind; cigarette smuggling and constituency boundary redistribution. On these issues and issues like them members should feel less inclined to blindly support the party line.

As well as breaking with their party to represent constituents' views, members could also be representing their own views based on common sense logic which the individual member may bring to the issue in question.

There is a feeling that if members are suddenly freed from party discipline there will be chaos with complete unpredictability in the system. Members will be voting every which way and Parliament will become unworkable and the country ungovernable.

This is not where this motion leads at all. It simply recognizes that on occasion members without fear of retribution from party leadership may vote against the party line. The government will not fall. The sun will still rise in the east and I believe the interests of Canadians will be better served by their elected representatives. Is that not what we are all here to do, serve the Canadian public to the best of our abilities?

Enough about the content of my motion. Now I would like to deal with the history of this matter, a history which began long before most of us got here. It began with a feeling of dissatisfaction among the Canadian people which was detected by the Canadian Study of Parliamentary Group in a Gallup poll it commissioned in 1983.

A question was asked as to how MPs should behave when voting. The response was that 49.5 per cent felt members should vote according to their own judgment. By way of contrast the view that the member should vote as the party wishes received very little support. The national average in the survey favouring the MP as party loyalists was only 7.9 per cent.

The frustration with MPs following the party line which the public expressed in this survey found its way into the 1985 report of the special committee on Reform of the House of Commons. This committee believed that "the purpose of reform of the House of Commons in 1985 is to restore to private members an effective legislative function, to give them a meaningful role in the formation of public policy". One of the main methods by which this goal was to be accomplished was by attitudinal change. This would result in a relaxation of the confidence convention, allowing members to occasionally vote against the party line without fear of bringing down the government or retribution by the party leadership.

The report of the McGrath committee was quite clear on the subject of the confidence convention and freer votes. The committee stated that "once elected, members of Parliament are legally and constitutionally entitled to act independently". In