

Private Members' Business

government would think about its agenda. However, the reality is that the government agenda is the agenda that will come through this House.

What we are talking about is not to change things 100 per cent, but merely to create the atmosphere in which members feel free to exercise their own independent best judgment, not just in the House but in committee. Even more important is before it gets to committee, when it is still a germ of an idea in someone's head, when the formulation of policy is put together, before we get all the political capital organized in a particular mode of action so that if that course of action is changed in any way it becomes a vote of confidence in the government or in the person who initiated the action.

That is what has us in this position today as a nation. It does not matter whether all of us are 100 per cent right all of the time, because we are not. That is the beauty of this place. There are 295 members here and the collective judgment and wisdom of all of us here today is infinitely better than the individual wisdom of the smartest and most intelligent among us.

We find ourselves in a situation in which in this Parliament or in business if the leader happens to come up with an idea or says something that seemed like a good idea at the time we all scurry about trying to justify whatever the leadership or the leader or a particular person might have said, even if it is a slip of the tongue. God help us, we cannot in any way endanger this person by saying that if this person is not 100 per cent right all the time then perhaps this person does not have the ability to lead.

I am not suggesting that is true of any particular party. That is just as true in our party. We have to be careful and we have to guard against that. This is human nature. It happens in business, it happens in politics and it happens everywhere.

The real job of all of us is to question and to say to the leadership: "Do you really think that is what we should be doing? I know we started out on this and perhaps the bill is in second reading already, but do you not think it might be a good idea if we changed it?". I guess that is what we want, the flexibility, the wisdom and the freedom to change and learn as we go along.

Our experience here has been kind of fun because we have been talking about freer votes and when the votes come up members opposite watch to see who among us is going to be the first not to vote along the party line. We are looking forward to being the first not to vote along the party line because we know that sooner or later we are going to have to otherwise certain members are never going to give us peace. We are going to do it sooner or later somehow.

However, the reality is that we have to follow the principles that got us elected in the first place. We gain from experience. I

am gaining from experience as we go along. I am certainly not shy to admit the fact that many of the preconceived ideas that I had about how this place worked I have changed since I arrived here. I see how this place works and I am learning every day, as we all are.

● (1205)

I would like to conclude my comments by quoting someone I think is of particular value to this House and whom we might all keep in mind as we go into the future. There are two people whose names are brought up many times in this House. One is the famous Edmund Burke. In Edmund Burke's letter to the electors of Bristol he pretty much debunks the whole notion of representative democracy. He was in support of delegate democracy through which once every election the electors decide who they are going to vote for and they vote for that person and for better or worse that person ends up in Parliament and they get their next crack at him four years hence.

Members opposite would know that this famous letter to the electors of Bristol was written in 1776 or thereabouts and had to do with the treatment of the British patriots, the sailors who were called pirates. They were captured, taken to England and held there for three years, given a fair trial and hanged. He did not think that was a good idea and said so. His electors thought it was a good idea and they said so. He wrote the letter to the electors of Bristol saying: "You not only have my body, you have my mind. If you do not like what I am doing turf me at the end of my term".

Interestingly, they did turf him at the end of that term and he went on to be re-elected in a rotten borough.

The other person, a contemporary of his, was Thomas Paine. Thomas Paine was the adviser to Thomas Jefferson and helped to frame the famous Declaration of Independence. He wrote in his work *The Rights of Man* that the greatest tyranny of all is the tyranny of the presumption of ruling beyond the grave, and that each generation has the right and the responsibility to govern for its times and should not bind any future generation to its decisions any more than this generation should be bound by decisions made by past generations.

I would ask that as this debate unfolds we consider that our generation and this Parliament are setting the foundation upon which future parliaments will base decisions. If we can relax the rules of discipline it would be for the benefit of all Parliament and all parliamentarians and we need not be concerned about going all in one direction or another.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I have two minutes so I shall try to be very effective.