

Private Members' Business

make life almost unbearable for honest debate from within a party. If the party basically decided that you were on the right track, it would say: "Never mind your conscience. This is the party line. If you don't agree with it you are gone; you are an independent".

• (1730)

Then you have to go back to your electorate 90 days later. Sometimes when members of Parliament make a decision to disagree with their leadership and even if they take the route of being independent, the judgment of their decision or the realization of what they are trying to achieve might not register to the electorate for a year or two down the line.

The full meaning of some of the differences that we have in here are not realized. Let us just take, for example, the government's position on the GST. The government has taken a position which obviously we on this side of the House disagree with. We believe that this is a regressive policy measure. I am sure there are Conservative members over there who are saying: "Gosh, I would like to be an independent. I would like to cross the floor because my constituents do not necessarily agree with the leadership of my party in this tax thrust that it has taken us into".

They are basically telling their constituents: "Let us wait and see, because we believe that over 18 months or in two years it will be a good thing for Canada".

With all the deep respect and feeling that I have for my colleague from Ottawa South, and I tend from time to time to have differing points of view, I think that I would be a prime candidate for someone who might be a little bit independent. The next thing you know, I would have to go out and face a by-election and in 90 days, taking on all of my colleagues, I do not think I could ever make my point.

If we follow the logic of the member's point that you are only responsible for 5 per cent of the vote, it would seem to me that if we followed this course to its natural conclusion, if I became an independent or if I was kicked out of my party and I had to go to the people 90 days later by this law, I probably would not be back here.

Again, I repeat that in the Liberal Party we can have these open debates in the national boardroom here of the House of Commons. I know that he will not take this personally, but on this particular bill, I cannot support my colleague.

Mr. Patrick Boyer (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, I find this a very curious bill to be sponsored in private members' hour by a private member of the House of Commons.

If it had come from one of the party whips, I could better understand its intent. When the hon. member for Ottawa South says as he did 15 minutes ago or so that party discipline is another and separate issue, I entirely disagree.

This bill has everything to do with one of the serious problems that is strangling this place, and has been for several decades. I am referring to the rise of partyism in Parliament. This bill which goes straight to the very norms of our political behaviour in the House of Commons would require that a member resign his or her seat, that it be declared vacant upon sitting as an independent or crossing the floor to another party and that there be a by-election within 90 days.

When I heard that and heard the member for Ottawa South saying that this would then be a ratification vote by the electors of that MP's decision, it took me back to the days of Sir John A. Macdonald. Whenever a cabinet minister was appointed, they had to get re-elected because they had assumed an office of profit under the Crown. They had to go to the people to get that kind of ratification.

That was such an encumbrance on this place in those days that they found all kinds of inventive ways to get around it, including one famous time, the double shuffle when everybody was moved from one portfolio to another to avoid going out to these by-elections.

It reminds me in another way of what Sir John A. was all about when he was trying to round up what he called the "loose fish" who swam around here in the House of Commons. The "loose fish" were the people who were not necessarily aligned with any one of the political parties. He wanted, as he was then building a national party, to bring everyone inside the comfortable ambit of that party. That was fine in the late 19th century when we needed to create national political parties. In the late 20th century the role of the political parties here in the