

Government Orders

Mr. Dan McTeague (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Calgary Southwest for his rather enlightening comment on what the Reform Party's position would be with respect to recall.

• (1745)

This reminds any budding student of history of the famous debate that took place some two centuries ago in the 1790s when the member for Bristol in England in the other Parliament discussed the various pros and cons of the system which the member, some generations later, has just suggested.

My concern to the hon. member is that it seems very clear that the system the member proposes is not only cumbersome, it could very well be costly. If he stops to consider that if 50 per cent of the signatures are required in any one constituency, what is the cost that is going to be attributed to that very taxpayer in terms of determining whether or not those are valid signatures?

The second part of that would be simply the cumbersome nature of having that kind of a system.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, two or three points. I thank the member for his question. First of all, on recall if you set these safeguards high enough and strongly enough you can ensure that the instrument is not abused so it is not accessibly costly.

On the second point, I would ask the members to consider the cost of having an unacceptable member of Parliament who will not or cannot represent your views. That is the cost you have to offset against the cost a removal mechanism.

The third point I would make is the member made reference, and other members in this House have done this, to the famous speech by Edmund Burke in which he said that he owed his constituents his conscience, not his vote. This is the most articulate expression, the trusteeship theory of representation. It predated the existence of parties. The other thing the members should remember is that Edmund Burke was never elected again in the electoral district of Bristol.

Mr. Murray Calder (Wellington—Grey—Dufferin—Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, with the discussion we are having here on free vote, there has to be a common ground between free vote and responsible government.

There is a beautiful example south of the border which is predominantly free vote. On different issues I have watched and read in the newspaper, we have seen shameless vote buying.

What I would like to know right now is where the leader of the Reform Party thinks the common ground is between free vote and responsible government.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that question. He hits on a very pertinent point. I believe this free vote convention that we have suggested covers that common

ground. It gives the members the freedom to kill a bill or a portion of a bill, but when they do that it reverts back to asking the House if it wanted to kill this bill or this portion of a bill, or did it actually want to kill the entire administration because it has no confidence in it.

That free vote convention covers that common ground. It gives the members this individual capacity to kill an individual piece of legislation but ultimately also makes them accountable for the entire administration and it accountable to them. I thought this free vote convention we are proposing endeavoured to cover that common ground.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank members for co-operating. The time has long ago expired. With unanimous consent I will now go back to debate.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important debate we are having and it is going to be extremely difficult and frustrating for me to be limited to 10 minutes.

For the last 20 years of my life I have been practising participatory democracy first as a municipal politician and more recently in Parliament. I have dedicated most of my political career to opening up the processes of government, to making it more truly representative of the views of the people I represent and more broadly of the views of Canadians and their communities. I would love to debate at length why I disagree fundamentally with the member for Calgary Southwest, the leader of the Reform Party.

Let me come to the subject of this particular bill before us because as I see the context of this bill, for nine years we have had a government that fundamentally did not believe in the role of government in society and therefore had a great deal of difficulty governing well and had a great deal of difficulty governing with respect for the people of Canada and their opinions.

• (1750)

I heard many times in the House: "We have to make tough decisions and if they do not like us they can throw us out at the next election". I do not believe that democracy begins and ends at the ballot box. It is something that goes on every day. It is the relationship between an individual member of Parliament and their constituents, it is a relationship between the institution of Parliament and all Canadians.

This motion in my view is a significant step forward in that relationship not because how we conduct our affairs in this Chamber or in our committees is of great overwhelming importance to Canadians, they really are not interested in our standing orders, but they are interested in what our decision making process is and how their views count in that process.