

*Private Members' Business*

What about the MPs themselves? They come here and they follow the party line. There is little free thinking. Attendance drops off. Mr. Fisher, in speaking to our caucus prior to us coming here, put it very well when he said that most or a lot of MPs become good constituency people. Really that is giving them the benefit of the doubt that in fact they must be working in their constituency because they are certainly not working here.

We have to try and find the answer. Some say it is in committee work. For others, it is that they had better toe the party line or be kicked out. Freer votes, I believe, are a solution to at least part of this problem. This was recognized in the throne speech in 1991. It was said that freer votes were definitely a way to make this better.

The famous red book in 1993 suggested that MPs should be given a freer vote and count for more in committees and in the House. So it goes. Freer votes have been dealt with by many, many people but have not been instituted as yet.

Why have we come to this conclusion? Why do we feel this way? Maybe we can examine a little deeper some of the reasons. The first one might be in committee work itself. It is said, as I have said, that you can make a difference in committee work and that it does not have to be just that old party follow the line sort of thing.

• (1140)

I have seen discussions occur in committee work. In our committee we had a two-day seminar where we looked at the areas of interest to our committee. Members got a feel for where the members of Parliament on that committee really were at.

When it comes right down to it, it seems that we will go back to the organizational phases of the committee. Here we should have looked at things like merit. We should have looked at where they were from in the country and whether there was fair regional representation. We found that the party whip or his assistant came along and made the decision that Bloc members should be the vice-chair of every committee.

It did not matter whether we had representation from all parts of Canada or not. We have been looking at the estimates. The party position seems to come through loud and clear. I suppose when we do our reports, again we will have a party position or that of the chairman, vice-chairman and so on because of the majority situation.

Opposition members will be left to do little else than submit a minority report and one does not really know whether anyone looks at it or not. What does that do? It makes one wonder why one really works so hard on committees. Let us look at the House.

In the House we sit and listen. I know that members are aware of the excellent ideas, the good research and the good speeches that are given here by all parties. Does it really matter because we always come back to voting the party line? I suppose the best example that was brought out to me was when I moved an amendment to a motion to exclude the Senate from joint standing committees.

I felt that was something the electorate was saying about the other place. Most MPs feel that way about the other place. Again we voted the party line. Again we could not have a free vote. We could not say what we or the people of Canada thought. Instead, we thought about the spin doctors of party politics.

How can we develop a national pride and trust in politicians if we are always going by party line? How should we decide a vote? How should it really go on any bill? We should listen to the speeches. As I have mentioned, the quality is certainly there. In committees we should go into the depth of the issues, look at the details, the facts and the solutions. All members should then be made aware of what occurred. That would be how they get their information.

We must get the constituents involved. We must have town hall meetings from day one. We should have phone blitzes, TV shows and householders that are not simply political propaganda or what MPs feel is good material. It should really count for something. We should really be trying to inform the electorate.

I am really impressed with how the general public communicates with its members of Parliament. Those people have given some thought. They expect their member to vote their will, not simply the party line of thinking. Members can see why many politicians and many members of the public have lost faith in the system we have here.

The procedures of Parliament as I would see them then would result in a bill being introduced. It could be stated up front whether it is a confidence motion. The committees would report in detail on the bill. The members would speak and other members would come to listen. It would count for something. The members' speeches would have some meaning.

Members must have the opportunity to communicate with their constituents. Finally, when the vote occurred it could be passed, modified or defeated. That would not change or put any aspersions on the present government. In order to make this happen, we must re-educate a number of people.

• (1145)

We must re-educate members of the media. They cannot look on every defeat of a bill as being a defeat of the government. They must see the positive side of having all of that extra input.

The government must not think of things as being a defeat or a win or a lose situation. The opposition of course must not take advantage of the situation where a bill is defeated and hold that