

Government Orders

I wonder in this debate how he can reconcile that with more free votes. I have a problem every time I do that.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question and the dilemma that freer votes can create in that respect.

What I am saying, and I am sure this is the member's experience, that issues will come along where the party line is quite clear and he is absolutely aware that his constituents on that particular issue want him to do something different than his party. In other words, I am not talking now about general support for his party. I am talking about whether the public supports him standing up and voting in favour of some measure put forward by his party with which his constituents disagree.

We are suggesting that the free vote convention should be flexible enough to permit him to vote the way his constituents wish in that conflict situation and for him not to be subject to censor by his party or accused of being a radical or a dissident by the media. That would be my response.

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on what my colleague from Haldimand—Norfolk said to the member for Calgary Southwest. When the member for Calgary Southwest talks about freer votes, referendums and recall, I ask this question. I was one of the promoters of what we are talking about today, free votes and more freedom to the committees and things like that. I have no problem with recall if that is what comes out of this. I have been recalled many times. However, I believe that if we do not vote the way our constituents want us to we do not have to worry about that very long either.

● (1740)

However, in all sincerity, if we do what we are talking about, about opening this place up and making it freer in every respect that we can, will that not in itself take care of many of the problems we are talking about today?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the member's question is yes, up to a point. But just having freer debate or freer discussion in my view is not enough. It has to be carried that one step further where if, as a result of the discussion here, one comes to a conclusion somewhat different than one's party or one's constituents come to, that one would have the freedom to exercise it.

Certainly this greater freedom of debate and expression is a step in the right direction, but to cap it off there has to be some application to the voting as well as the speaking.

Mr. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, because this is such an important issue and we have the leader of the Reform Party who spent many hours and years working on this issue maybe we could have the unanimous consent of the House to continue questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed not to see the clock for three more people to pose questions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: I take it there is unanimous consent. Is there with the Reform Party?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Very well. The three members who were standing up can, with unanimous consent, put their questions but please do it briefly.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, I am sympathetic and support many of the hon. member's recommendations. There are some that I do not support, but I have real concern when he puts this emphasis on always listening to the popular view of our constituents.

I have not always shared the popular view of my constituents. In fact I will give a specific example. When I started off opposing the Charlottetown accord, for the first two weeks of the campaign there were many of my constituents who did not share my view. Over a period of time many came around.

The member does not realize that in this Chamber we have to deal with national issues that do not just concern the people of our riding but we have to make a judgment call and be sensitive to all regions and all concerns of other members in this House.

I do not always believe it is the popular view of our ridings that should drive us.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I should make clear to the member that I am not talking about turning members of Parliament into a voting machine where all they do is go home on the weekend, count noses on an issue and come back here and stick up their hands or not. I am not talking about that.

I agree with the member that there are lots of issues where the relationship between the member and his constituents has to be one of dialogue. The constituents may think this way and we go to them and say that we think differently because we have had this experience and have been exposed to this debate from others in the House.

My experience has been that if our constituents think that we will defer to their judgment if push came to shove they will often defer to ours. However, if they think we are going to do what we want to do or what our party wants to do regardless of what they think, then that is where we lose them.

I agree with the member there has to be dialogue, but I do think if push comes to shove the constituents ought to have the final say.