

Private Members' Business

in which people feel compelled to leave the existing party.

Some may disagree with this but I believe that the measures I have proposed will further the cause of greater independence of members of Parliament as individuals. It does provide a means clearly sanctioned in the law for them to withstand the pressure and have the support of their electors on important issues of conscience or public policy.

The proposition is very simple. We are here to represent the people who sent us here. They have chosen us, perhaps in some cases because of wit, intelligence, or other reasons. Somebody across suggested good looks. I do not think it was directed at me; I think it was directed at the member for Western Arctic, from what I could gather. But whatever the reason, in most of our cases, I am afraid, the party affiliation and the positions that our parties have taken on issues in general elections have been key to the decisions that our electors make when they go into the polling station.

That consideration being so important, it is very simply my view that if our democracy is truly to work well then on this all-important crucial matter of party affiliation the change between elections should receive the ratification upon consultation of the electors of a member's own district.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Forestry): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to the hon. member for Ottawa South and what he had to say about his Private Members' Bill, Bill C-322. I welcome this opportunity to speak in this debate, and this is not to say that the hon. member's concept is a negative one. In fact, I think it is very interesting, but I wonder to what extent the philosophy of this bill is in line with our parliamentary tradition, with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the criteria that are already provided by law when a Canadian decides to stand for election at the federal level. These are points we must consider when we analyse this bill.

I agree with the hon. member that when one takes the trouble to run for a given political party, to a certain extent one has to support the party's campaign platform as well as the party's leader and policies, because of the British parliamentary system. And according to the rules of this particular game, the more elected members one has, the better one's chances of forming the government, and vice versa. In our parliamentary system, our political affiliation does limit our independence.

But this hardly means that once a member has been elected under a party's banner, he can no longer think for himself, no longer disagree with his party or with a government policy and that otherwise the House of Commons will force a member to resign his seat so a new election can be called. I think that is going a bit too far.

First of all, this goes against the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. What about freedom of association and freedom of expression? Do we want to further restrict the freedom of expression of parliamentarians? I think debate is healthy, and if for some reason a member, whatever his convictions, wishes to cross the floor of the House, the only possible sanction should come from his constituents when an election is called and they let him know whether the parliamentarian made the right choice.

I do not think this kind of legislation would make it any easier for members to work effectively. We are elected to this House to work to the best of our ability and serve certain principles we believe to be right and also to serve the interests of our constituents. When we are elected in an electoral district, we do not necessarily need an absolute majority. Often we can win with 2, 3, 4 or 5 per cent. There are always plenty of people who do not share our views. If people do not have to agree with the member they elected, why shouldn't the member be allowed to have opinions that go against the principles of his party and his government? Why, in a democratic system like ours, should we prevent a member from changing his mind or changing his seat, because he wants to work with a new political party or even create his own? Why should we prevent him, just because he was elected under a given political banner, from taking this kind of action, when freedom of expression is one of the foundations of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms?