

*Government Orders*

Its first use was marred by this abuse when a group of lawyers in Calgary whose politics will remain nameless reportedly offered the good citizens of High River up to \$5 a signature to sign a recall petition against the premier.

Incidentally, and I do not think the Prime Minister mentioned this the other day, it may be of interest to members to know that when the Alberta recall bill was repealed by the Alberta legislature it was done by a free vote. The premier at the time, William Aberhart, voted against the repeal as did my father who was a cabinet minister at the time. The repeal was carried by a majority of the backbenchers who considered the bill to be defective.

Any modern recall mechanism to be considered by the standing committee should have three major safeguards based on what can be learned from the lessons of the past.

It should have a high threshold level. In other words a large number of electors would have to sign a recall petition in order to recall a member of Parliament and force a by-election. We have suggested that the threshold level be 50 per cent plus one of the number of electors who voted in the previous general election. In the constituency of Markham—Whitchurch—Stouffville for example, this would mean that almost 37,000 electors would have to sign the recall petition in order to trigger the recall of the member of Parliament who has lost their confidence.

In addition we would propose that except in exceptional circumstances such as where it can be demonstrated that a member of Parliament made fraudulent representations to electors during the general election campaign, recall not be available to electors until 18 months after a general election and that it be available for use only once in a riding during the term of a parliament. This together with the high threshold level would largely prevent the politically motivated harassment of MPs by their political opponents or by well heeled interest groups through abuse of the recall mechanism.

While some members of Parliament may ridicule the concept of recall I would encourage the more objective among us to do one thing. Members should do an informal or formal survey in their own ridings to find out what their constituents think about these direct democracy measures, the use of referendums and citizens' initiatives, freer votes, and the right of recall. I believe hon. members will find there is a great deal of public support for these measures and whether we like it or not the most popular of these three instruments is the right of recall.

I close by again commending the government House leader and others for bringing forward the proposed changes to the standing orders we are discussing today. My only request is that we persevere and go three steps further toward making this Parliament an even more democratic and accountable institution for the 21st century.

Reform members look forward with anticipation to the report of the standing committee called for by the final paragraph of the motion, in particular its recommendations on procedures for achieving freer votes, the institution of recall, and the incorporation of the results of referendums and citizens' initiatives into legislative acts.

• (1730)

**Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth):** Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the hon. member often in the last two years as he led a political party from relative obscurity to one that certainly holds some currency with the Canadian public today. I do respect his views, although I may not agree with all of them.

The hon. member has done quite a lot, as has his party through their political movement to ensure that we just do not heap scorn upon those of us who seek to do public service through our respective legislatures but by raising some real issues. Sometimes institutions change very slowly. As a young member of Parliament I can tell the hon. member that much of which he speaks I have supported and I will continue to support.

The whole concept of why we are here, whether it is to serve our party, our political masters within the party or our constituents, I am sure is one that each member of Parliament has had to deal with at some point since this country was formed. It is a matter of compromise and it is a matter of balance.

We have a party system. It means that within our party structures we try to draw a consensus on major issues. To have a complete lack of any discipline within the caucus system, I would put forward, would lead to some anarchy and perhaps some extreme forms of legislation, coming as the member would say from the executive. I think there is a balance.

However, I do agree that excessive discipline has been used in this place and in political parties for far too long. It has caused an abuse of the privileges of members who come here to speak on behalf of their constituents.

I want to ask the leader of the Reform Party if he believes there is a happy medium between complete direct democracy for every member and the party discipline system. I have noticed in the few votes we have had in this House that it appears that either they are birds of a feather flocking together or—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I think the member has the question.