

able way, the House has the power to exercise the many prerogatives it has.

[English]

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver): Mr. Speaker, the member justified voting against the wishes of his constituents on the basis that they could judge him at election time. But the hon. member knows that there are many issues that come before the House during a session and that it is unreasonable for him to say that they could judge him on one or other issue of the hundreds that come before us.

Can the member not see that by picking and choosing when his personal beliefs will interfere with his representation of the people who elected him, that he is taking an elitist attitude to the people who elected him.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, the member may think I am an elitist. I find the comment rather odd as I came from the most humble beginnings to take my seat in Parliament. As the member gets to know me he will learn about that. The last thing I have ever been called is elitist as I will describe to him privately later. But that is certainly not the case.

The proposition I am advancing to the member is that governments have to be accountable, MPs have to be accountable for what they say. That does not mean they cannot consult with their electors all the time. But it also means another thing; that if members do not have discipline as a party, no obligation to live with the program their party makes, either the one that I present or the one the member presented to the Canadian people, then surely the freedom he is advocating could also be used to go against the collective wishes of those who sent him here in the belief that within his own constituency there would be half or 1 or 2 or 3 per cent of the people more against the program of his own party than those who are for it. That is the caution I want to give the hon. member.

• (1815)

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island): Mr. Speaker, I join in this very historic debate today. I believe we are at a crossroads in this country.

I found it rather interesting and almost amusing to hear people on the other side talk about what a wonderful breakthrough this is, that we are debating things before we actually decide them. I asked: "Has it never been the case before?" I am new to the political process. I did not even belong to a political party before I became involved very recently.

I am astounded to find that what I dealt with during the election campaign is actually true, that for the most part our democracy is very inclusive. It is inclusive among a very small

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number of people. I applaud the government for the steps it is taking. It is wonderful we are having this debate, that we are looking forward to actually producing and having some changes, not just talk, but some actual changes.

We need to reform the democratic process. It occurred to me while I was sitting here that perhaps we are observing an oxymoron. We are having a liberalization and a reform of the democratic process, two very different words and yet to a great extent we are heading in the same direction.

I believe that one of the reasons we have so much mistrust of politicians is that our democracy works only in spurts. We have a spurt of involvement of the people at election time and then they are ignored until the next election. Consequently people mistrust the politicians because they detect and observe no ongoing accountability.

There is an interesting statement in the red book which is so oft quoted in this Chamber. It really is not surprising that it should be in the book. The Reform Party and my involvement in it came as a result of this "new emphasis in listening to the people, the constituents, the voters and the taxpayers".

When we listened to the taxpayers we found out among other things that there was a great deal of mistrust and distrust because of lack of consultation. The Liberal Party in its work to get elected did a good thing also. It began listening to the people. It probably did it through its polling techniques or whatever, but it heard the same message we heard that gave birth to our party and it was that people want to be involved on an ongoing basis in the decisions of government.

The quote I would like to take from the red book is: "The people are irritated with governments that do not consult them or that try to conduct key parts of the public business behind closed doors". That is the truth which we are reaching for here.

I pledge, and I am sure that I speak on behalf of all the members of my party, that we are going to work together to enhance not only the ease with which Parliament works but also with its accountability to the people.

In that regard I would like to address for a few minutes a very important aspect of our work in representing the constituents, those that elected us. There is a lot of fear among politicians—and maybe I am wrong here—in talking on an ongoing basis with the electors and truly representing them. I hear over and over innuendo that they are not to be trusted, that perhaps they do not have enough ability, enough education, enough sense of history, enough perspective or maybe they are too narrow and they think only of themselves and so they cannot be involved on an ongoing basis.