

The government of the day led by a fellow, Mulroney—that is his name. He had two people, one of whom is now the Deputy Speaker of this Chamber and the other who was the member for Calgary Northeast. What happened to them when they voted against the GST? They not only had a free vote, they got a free ride right out of their caucus the same day.

We will in the overwhelming majority of cases be voting with our parties, not because we are sheep but because we have hammered out our compromises behind closed doors.

I will get suspicious if I see a free voter voting free too often. I will say to myself: Can he not convince his colleagues of anything? Is he a lone ranger? Has he no clout in his own caucus? Does he have to come here and vote his own way all the time? Why is he not back in his caucus room convincing his own caucus of the rightness of his ways? That is what the caucus system is all about.

• (1555)

Yes, we will have free votes, but will it become the order of the day. I cannot see why it would. As a Canadian let alone as a politician I think it would be a fairly messy way to do business. We did not get here by our good looks. One or two of us did maybe. The people of Canada did not take us as individuals. They embraced the Liberal message in one riding. They embraced the Bloc message in another riding and the Reform message in another. Each of our parties had very specific platforms. And now for someone to stand up and say that has all gone out the window and that from now on we are going to be real free around here. Real free. Remember that mandate you got back there in so and so riding? Forget that buddy, just be free.

Some of us understand that any freedom attaches to it responsibility. If I exercise my freedom when I stand and vote for cuts in defence spending, I will be having a free vote. Just because another 176 members happen to be of the same mind on that free vote is not my problem. I will be voting because I believe in it. I will be voting because that is what my constituents told me to do. Now that is about as free as you can get. Free does not have to mean being alone. If you want me to be an isolationist I will pick some "comma" legislation some day and stand up against the government just to show that I am a free spirit. But who have I helped? How have I helped my constituents with that bit of grandstanding?

The people of Canada want us to do the right thing and if we carry this free vote thing to its conclusion, what we ought to do is what the gentleman from Beauce did. All 295 of us should go out and get elected without a party label. But Canadian people like choices now. They like to say that here is what the Liberals stand for, here is what the Bloc stands for and here is what the Tories stand for. I think we will take those. I cannot willy-nilly

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having gone through that process say: "Okay people of Canada, thanks now forget it because I am going to be my own man".

Finally, in my last minute or so let me deal directly with the amendment put forward by the Leader of the Opposition together with the subamendment of the leader of the third party. Both of them are well-intended I am sure. I will not read the wording because I see my time is running out. But you all know the wording. You had better because you voted on it. Both asked me, I say with candour but deference, to say that I have no interest in putting public finances on a more sound footing. That is not true. I do have an interest.

Therefore why do they ask me to vote a lie? Why do they ask everybody on this side to vote a lie on that particular issue? Surely the wording of these motions are classic examples of what is wrong with this place. That clever use of well chosen verbiage in the hope of creating one-upmanship in the hope of sucking somebody in to get him to vote for something he does not believe in. That is what is wrong with this place. Oh, that clever use of verbiage.

I was a bit disappointed that it came from the leader of the Reform party and the leader of the Bloc. That they would ask us to say that we have no interest. Mea culpa, mea culpa. I have a great interest in seeing that public finances are put on a sound footing.

Did the framers of those two amendments honestly believe for one minute, for one millisecond, that nobody on this side, not one single soul of the 177 including the crowd over there in the Siberian rump on the other side, not one of us is concerned about the state of the country's finances? Does anyone in the Reform Party believe that for a second? What an insult to 176 people.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Bélisle (La Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Burin—St. George's for his brilliant speech. I would also like to tell him that the province of Newfoundland—he will remember for sure when he reads his history books—joined the Confederation in 1949.

We will recall that the citizens of that province voted in more than one referendum before joining Canada in the late 1940s.

Would the hon. member from Newfoundland not agree that, conversely, Quebecers can vote for their full sovereignty, in a second referendum, according to the democratic rules that prevail in Canada and in this Parliament?

If the citizens of Newfoundland were able to join the Canadian federation freely, why would it not be possible for Quebecers to withdraw from it freely? That is the essence of the democracy that exists in this country and millions of people around the world envy us for that.