

*Motion Respecting House Vote*

have the assurance that defeating the government on a bill does not mean defeating the government itself, but rejecting the bill only. So, if in 15 days, the government comes back with a bill to increase another tax, and if a Liberal member feels that his constituents are against such an increase in taxes, he may say: My constituents do not want me to vote in favour of the bill, but that does not mean that I vote against my party; that means I vote for my constituents.

If I asked all Liberal members here: Are your constituents approving an increase of the income tax? They would all answer: No.

In the circumstances, it is their duty to vote against this bill.

Since our situation was not yet clear, and since the Liberal members were not sure that it would necessarily mean another election, they put the party above their constituents.

Therefore, we are now creating a precedent which will prevail for a long time, according to which the members commonly known as back-benchers, who are too seldom asked for their opinion and too often stopped from expressing their ideas and convictions, will be able to vote at any time against measures introduced by the government without it meaning that they are beating their own party, a minister, the leader of their party or the government, and without it necessarily leading to an election.

As for the members of the official opposition, the Conservatives who hope one day—I am not sure when—to come to power, the precedent set today will give them the same opportunity to vote against a measure presented by their government if they decide that the measure is a bad one and that it is contrary to the interests of their constituents.

This does not mean that the government is bad. It merely means that the bill introduced by the minister and the government is bad.

I shall give an example. Three or four months ago, the United States President, Mr. Johnson, asked the American Congress to vote a 10 per cent tax increase. Congress refused. Mr. Johnson is still President of the United States. The American congress voted against the 10 per cent tax increase asked by President Johnson. It was not any more serious than that. Mr. Johnson is still President of the United States.

It is the same thing in the present case. Democracy only exists when each and every member can actually vote on every piece of legislation as they see fit, according to their

[Mr. Grégoire.]

conscience and the interests of their constituents, rather than according to party lines.

It seems to me that the experience resulting from the precedent in the United States and the one we now have in the house should show us that true democracy is not a matter of supporting the party first, but rather the people we represent. But that was not clear in the minds of hon. members.

I am convinced that before the vote on Monday, 95 per cent of the Liberal members who voted for the bill were convinced that voting against the bill meant voting against the government and that an election would follow. But today it has become an extraordinary power for the Liberal members. They will now be able to vote against any estimate, motion or amendment introduced by the government without it being a vote of non-confidence.

It is as simple as that. You can vote against a measure, a bill, but not necessarily against the government. Hon. members should try to benefit from the lesson, and direct their vote in the future, not towards a minister of the government—he will stay there, a motion of non-confidence is necessary to defeat him—but thinking of their constituents. In 1963, that is what took place. The motion ended by those words: This government no longer has the confidence of the people. That was specific. But defeat a bill, that is not specific. The interests of the people must come before the interests of the party; we can defeat a measure without defeating the government, and we now have the best example of that.

Monday we defeated a finance bill, a bill asking for a tax increase. But this did not indicate a lack of confidence in the government. It simply meant that we objected to a tax increase.

That is how I understood it, Mr. Speaker. When I voted on Monday evening, I did not vote for or against the government. Every time I am asked to vote on a bill, I study it. If I think it is a good one, I vote for it; if it goes against my ideas or principles, I vote against it. I am not concerned whether the government is Tory or Grit. I examine what I am voting against or what I am voting for. On Monday, I voted against Bill No. C-193 which asked for an increase in personal income tax, and that is all I voted against.

A new measure was introduced in the house today. Because there was some doubt, we are asked to show our confidence in the government. The Conservative party said no, we do not have confidence in the government.