

*Motion Respecting House Vote*

We are asked to put parliament in this ridiculous situation by a Prime Minister who is about to leave, whose time is limited, but who declines to do the honourable thing and depart a little earlier than he had intended. Apparently he has persuaded his followers to support him in this course of action. I hope that some of them will reconsider. The alternative is simple. The Prime Minister could appoint any one of a number of his cabinet members to be a caretaker prime minister.

I am enough of a politician to understand the reluctance to appoint a minister who is in the running for the party leadership. The Prime Minister might fear that with the reins of power once in that minister's hands he could not be dislodged, and perhaps it would not be the most advisable way for a new prime minister to start off with several cabinet ministers feeling they had been stabbed in the back. But there is nothing wrong with the Prime Minister asking the Governor General to appoint someone who has no ambitions to become prime minister but who would undertake the task in a neutral way for the time being. In fact, sir, the task would not have to be carried out very long. I submit that if the government would use some common sense, if the Prime Minister would be honest with his party and with the house and if the party would become responsible to parliament, with its members doing their duty as members of the house to maintain the house's traditions and the constitution, they would find this house very co-operative.

● (5:50 p.m.)

A caretaker prime minister would in effect create a new administration, and there is no doubt about a new administration having the right to bring its legislation before us. This ridiculous motion that the house is now considering should be put away, and the new prime minister could bring in such legislation as he wanted. He could prorogue or recess and would be in a wonderful position to ask for supply. I submit that if hon. members opposite, and the Prime Minister especially, are at all honest in their arguments that this is no time for an election, if they really feel that in this troubled financial period there should be a government at the helm able to get the co-operation of parliament, able to put through those measures necessary to bring about stability and confidence in our currency, then the solution is very simple.

I have heard it suggested by some that Dr. Forsey says that once defeated a prime minister does not have the right to go to the Governor General and recommend someone else. Of course that argument is based on the contention that once defeated on a motion of confidence a prime minister does not have that right. That is the argument that is put forward. I say that anyone who is going to use that argument against me is simply saying that this motion must be defeated. If the government is defeated on a motion of confidence the matter is finished and the government must resign if that argument holds true. Actually, however, I do not believe that Dr. Forsey goes that far, and I do not believe there is anything in our constitutional practice to support that argument.

It has always been understood that the one thing a prime minister must have to claim to be prime minister is the backing of the majority of the members of parliament. He is appointed on the basis that he claims to have that backing. He becomes the official adviser on proof that he has won a vote of confidence. From that time on he is the official and only adviser to the Governor General, and if in the case of defeat in the house he is able to advise the Governor General that someone else can form an administration and get the backing of the house, then the Governor General is bound to give that other person a try.

The Prime Minister has suggested that the only alternative to an election is to call upon the Leader of the Opposition. Of course this is something that could be done as well. But I submit that the Governor General would only call upon the Leader of the Opposition at the request or suggestion of the Prime Minister and then the Governor General would ask whether or not his new choice as prime minister thought he could control the majority of votes in the house. All such appointments really are temporary until such time as confidence is voted.

It is nearly six o'clock, Mr. Speaker, and I am going to repeat once more, and once more only, that the situation here is not as portrayed by the Prime Minister. It is not a case of resignation followed by an election, or appointment of the Leader of the Opposition. I say that the Prime Minister can resign and ask the Governor General to appoint someone else in his own party to form a government. If he did that then a caretaker government such as I am suggesting would hold office until the Liberal convention is over. Or the Prime Minister could prorogue the session. In