

*Lack of Confidence Vote*

has no place in rational argument, because it immediately gives rise to many phases of meaning that you can conjure with and that you can use to obscure the purpose of a debate like this. The original idea behind responsible government was simply the supremacy of parliament, and I think that that is the idea we have before us at the present time—the supremacy of this House, not the supremacy of any part of it; not the supremacy of the government or of the governmental party, but the supremacy of this body of elected representatives of the people. That is the idea that we have to hold before us.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: May I ask my hon. friend a question? How does he make out that it is in any way interfering with the supremacy of parliament to give parliament the right at any and all times to turn the ministry out of office?

Mr. BIRD: I agree that parliament ought to maintain its right to turn the ministry out of office, but it ought also to have the right to say whether a minister shall resign office or not. I mean that parliament ought to be the court of last resort in all instances, on all questions. Originally, as I understand it, responsible government applied to administration only; it meant that a government should be responsible to the House for its acts of administration, and had no reference at all to any transaction that took place within the House itself. That was a very reasonable view, as things were in times past. I hold that the Prime Minister's view of responsible government is out of harmony with the supremacy of parliament as we conceive it, because it simply means that the Cabinet is responsible not to parliament, but to itself. The Prime Minister resents the suggestion that the responsibility of the Cabinet to itself should be interfered with in any way and seems to maintain that the Cabinet should decide all questions that come up, and that nobody else should influence its decision.

Our contention is that the supremacy of this House is the supremacy of its majority—not of the majority of the Liberal party in power at the present time; not of the majority of the present cabinet, but of the majority of voices on the floor of the House. The liberties of the people cannot be preserved in any other way. This cabinet supremacy, which is altogether out of harmony with parliament's supremacy, is a thing of latter-day growth. We have seen, by slow development, the powers of parliament filched from our hand. I noted especially last session some expres-

[Mr. Bird.]

sions of the Prime Minister himself which indicated that he was sensible of that condition—some very remarkable expressions, as I thought, which showed also that the Prime Minister was a good deal better than his creed. His expressions on that occasion indicated his belief that an unhealthy kind of power had come to reside within cabinets, and he intimated that with a view of remedying the condition he was going to see that the Cabinet acted in future more as a committee of the House than it had done in the past. But how is it going to act as a committee of the House if it does not consult the House, if it does not extend to all sections in the House the right to be consulted—the latter, by the way, being a very famous phrase in the history of our constitution.

As I said at the outset, the really important aspect of this discussion is its bearing upon the third party in the House. We came here last year as a third party, important in point of numbers, and important, too, in respect to the impulse that sent us here—an impulse, which, I conceive, has not estranged it from the forward-looking members of the House, whatever party they belong to. Apart altogether from the sectional matters that we have to bring before you, you will recognize that behind us there is a true democratic impulse. Well, coming here last session we found that a place had by no means been prepared for us, and that when we naturally sought free discussion on many questions we found ourselves trammelled, our hands tied. In the budget debate we saw that come to a head when the third party was tied hand and foot in respect to a free expression of opinion upon matters which were important to the members of that party and to their constituents. That sort of thing is intolerable, and I say that if the Prime Minister and his Cabinet turn down this resolution, it is up to them to see that a greater degree of hospitality is extended toward this third party, this new factor in the parliament of Canada. They should see that we are given greater freedom of expression, that we are not trammelled in any way, in the matter of presenting to the House those things that we are sent here to lay before it.

Mr. MARTELL: Does my hon. friend not think that it is more in accordance with democracy that he should have the right, if he does not agree with the government, to move a resolution which could result in the defeat of the government, rather than that the way should be opened to the moving of all sorts of academic resolutions which would mean nothing?