

*The Address—Mr. Knowles*

On the other side of the picture is the fact that the governments of Canada throughout those 99 years have received adverse votes dozens, perhaps scores, of times. It depends, of course, upon the definition of what is an adverse vote, for many a time a government has had to change its position because of debate or because of a defeat on the floor of the house. But I am sticking to occasions when votes went against the wishes of the government without resulting in any suggestion of an election or request for dissolution.

I might point out first of all that in the very first Parliament of this country of ours, the parliament in which Sir John A. Macdonald was prime minister, there were in the first four sessions nine occasions on which the government was beaten—five times on government bills, twice on resolutions preceding government bills and twice on supply. Yet on none of those occasions did Sir John A. Macdonald seek the dissolution of parliament. In 1899 the government of that day brought before the house a speech from the throne. In the course of a debate on the address in reply, an amendment was moved by an opposition member. Then there was a subamendment which softened the language of the amendment. Both carried, and when the address was engrossed and delivered to the Governor General of that day it was not just the motion which the government had brought in in the first place; it was the motion brought in by the government, plus the things which had been added on the floor of parliament. No one suggested in 1899 that there should be a dissolution and an election. It was treated as an expression of opinion by the parliament of that day.

Let me give one other instance of a similar situation which arose in connection with the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne in 1951, in the days of the St. Laurent administration. It was the second session of 1951 and in December of that year an amendment was moved to the address. It contained words which the government did not like to vote against and which it could not vote for. So it had one of its own members move a subamendment to add some favourable words at the end of the amendment. The result was that everything carried—the subamendment carried, the amendment carried and the motion as amended carried. So what was engrossed and delivered to His Excellency on that occasion was not simply the motion of thanks, but a motion of

[Mr. Knowles.]

thanks plus some other words regretting the difficulties the farmers were facing in western Canada.

My point is that these were two occasions upon which the house was debating the Address in Reply from the Speech from the Throne, and what the government placed before parliament was not the form of the words delivered to the Governor General. What did this mean? It meant that on these two occasions the house had expressed its opinion, and the government accepted that opinion as an opinion of the house. But it did not seek dissolution.

There are other occasions when a similar course was followed—not on motions for an address, but similar in other respects. In 1944 we held a special session of that year's session of parliament to deal with the conscription issue. Those who were here on that occasion—not many of us, now—will recall that Mr. King asked parliament to make its decision with respect to the order in council he had brought in by placing before the house a motion of confidence in the war policy of the government. The motion was debated at length. Six or eight different amendments were tried, most of them being ruled out of order. But in the end an amendment moved by Mr. Coldwell, a very simple one which just took out three words, was carried on a division.

True, the government accepted it. But the result was that the motion of confidence which was passed by the house was in language different from that which the government had used in introducing it. Did Mr. King say that this represented non-confidence in the government, because the House had not accepted what was placed before it? Did he ask for dissolution? Not at all. He accepted this as an expression of the opinion of the house on that occasion.

● (5:20 p.m.)

Let me remind hon. members of at least three occasions in my experience here when supply motions were amended and got through the house without the government being brought down. The most striking one occurred on August 27, 1946, when we moved an amendment to a supply motion, calling on the government to consider keeping in effect the subsidies on milk which were in effect at the end of world war II. There was quite a debate on that, followed by a recorded vote with the Speaker in the chair. Our amendment carried, but was the government defeated? Was there an election? No; the government accepted it as an expression of the